

PSYCHOTHERAPY IN MEXICO

José Lichtszajn*
Universidad Anahuac
México

Reviewing the psychotherapeutic situation on the national scene has proven to be a rewarding experience. It has led the author to meet with old acquaintances and to talk with psychotherapists or psychoanalysts in charge of training programs in psychotherapy, learning of their divisions and common interests. It has also provided the author with a different perspective on the historical developments of our training in the past fifteen years. Twenty years ago one could rarely find a psychologist who could honestly claim he had good training as a psychotherapist, simply because no training institute would accept a candidate without a medical degree for training in this area. Then the first graduates from training institutes in Argentina, Europe and the U. S. returned to Mexico, with a Diploma in Freudian psychoanalysis, and formed their own association and training program. The Psychology Department at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (U.N.A.M.) soon became a fertile ground for their lectures on Freud, as well as an important source of referrals for their private practice.

In an attempt to break away from mother philosophy and father medical model, and without a well-defined professional identity in their own field, many psychology students were attracted to Freudian psychoanalysis. However, they soon found themselves frustrated by the impossibility of pursuing further training due to the lack of a medical background.

At about the same time, another important school became popular in Mexico due to the presence of Erich Fromm, who acquired a strong influence in the training of psychiatrists at the U.N.A.M.'s School of Medicine. The requirements for admission to this training program were somewhat less strict than were those of the Freudian analysts, but one could still rarely find a psychologist in this program.

As a means of coping with the frustration and resentment produced by the impossibility of further training, a few psychologists approached certain psychoanalysts sympathetic to our situation, asking them to initiate some type of unaccredited training program without the blessing of the official psychoanalytic institute, which they did. When the situation became known, the mounting pressure from some of their colleagues led some of the teachers to stop such training. In spite of this problem, a small group of psychologists continued with their coursework and personal analysis, and in 1965

the first training program in psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapy was established, under the name of the Asociación Mexicana de Psicoterapia Psicoanalítica, A.C. Eventually the students became teachers, and the teachers became Senior Supervisors. The program has now matured into a course of training of eight semesters duration, with each semester consisting of five seminars with a minimum of 36 sessions per seminar. Included among the courses are: a review of Freud's complete works, techniques of interviewing, general theory of neurosis and psychosis, supervision of groups, ego psychology, and techniques in child psychotherapy.

The official supervision starts during the first semester following the candidate's evaluation by a Board Committee. The first stage of supervision must consist of a minimum total of 120 hours, and the trainee meets with the supervisors once a week. The second stage of supervision is also subject to approval, and must consist of a minimum of 80 hours. The cost of the training is equivalent to \$600 per semester, independent of the cost of the candidate's personal analysis. Among the requirements for admission to the program are: a Master's degree in psychology, medicine, education, philosophy, social work, etc.; experience in handling problems within an authorized institution; minimum age of 25 years; and initiation of personal analysis at the beginning of training. As of January 1975, the Institute had graduated 20 psychotherapists. Five more were at that time already in training, and seven freshmen entered the program in February 1975.

Since the establishment of this Association, other programs have sprung up, based on the pressing needs of our expanding population and leading to an increasing interest in the work with groups, families, couples, etc. A relatively new program in psychoanalytically-oriented group psychotherapy is offered by the Institute of the Asociación Mexicana Psicoterapia Analítica de Grupo, which was formed by Freudian analysts, who offer a four-year program aimed at training group therapists. Candidates must undergo two years of personal treatment as members of a group before entering this program. The candidate must also hold a Ph.D. (or be in the process of obtaining it), hold an M.D. with a psychiatric background, or be a psychoanalyst. There is no internship, but a substantial part of the work is done in psychiatric hospitals during two of the four years. Supervision consists of being part of a group as an observer for one year, and conducting a group with the supervisor as the observer during the second year. Preparation of a thesis is required for obtaining the Diploma. Seven trainees have thus far graduated from this program; ten more are expected to complete their training in 1976. The program has aroused much interest, as evidenced by

the increasing number of applicants seeking admission to the Institute.

Training in family therapy is offered by the Instituto de la Familia, a program originally affiliated with the Universidad Iberoamericana. Since initiating its activities in 1970, the Institute has graduated 24 family therapists, 15 of whom hold degrees in psychology. Persons seeking admission to the program are expected to hold a Master's degree or its equivalent. At the end of two years training, the candidate must have worked with at least eight families under supervision; no less than two families are seen in institutions such as a children's hospital and the Department of Mental Health at the Pediatric Hospital of the National Medical Center. The trainee receives a total of 200 hours of supervision including his combined work in private practice and hospitals. A staff of five professors with a varied eclectic theoretical background is in charge of the program, which now has 27 trainees. This staff reflects the changing trend in the composition of new training programs: one psychologist, three psychoanalysts (one Freudian and two Frommian), and one psychiatrist. In spite of their different backgrounds, they have found a way of putting their combined efforts to work with families.

The university setting has not provided us with trained psychotherapists, although some Master's and Ph.D. programs offer theoretical courses which include the participation of trainees as members of groups. These groups—sensitivity, encounter, group dynamics, gestalt, etc.—are primarily aimed at providing a “feeling” of therapy through actual group participation.

A program in counseling following very closely the Rogerian school was formed in 1967 as an adjunct of the Counseling Center at the Universidad Iberoamericana. The purposes behind its formation were well-specified, one of the important goals being to remove the clinical psychologist from the classical image of the psychometrist. A Licenciatura degree (somewhat equivalent to a stage between the U. S. B.A. and Master's degrees) was required of the candidate. This three-year program included 10 theoretical seminars, over 30 seminars with a practicum, and participation in groups as well as in individual supervised training. The objective was to eventually transform this program, which was not officially incorporated into the graduate school, into a Master's degree program in psychotherapy. However, it never met the approval of higher authorities, since the Counseling Center did not meet the necessary academic requirements, and the program competed with the Master's degree program of the Psychology Department of the same university. The 35 graduates of the program may finally this year obtain

their official Diploma granted by the Psychology Department, this time with official approval from the authorities.

A new development took place at this same university with the formation of a Master's degree program in Pastoral Psychology. Since few priests registered in the program, it gradually became open to other professionals, such as economists, business administrators, engineers, etc. The main orientation of the program is Rogerian, but one can also find in it a combination of experiences and training in encounter, sensitivity, gestalt, etc. This program has now fully developed into a Master's degree program in Counseling and Human Development. Psychologists are admitted, but those candidates coming from professions other than psychology are required to take several seminars in topics such as personality theory, development psychology, psychopathology, etc. before their admittance into the two-year Master's program. A doctorate degree program in Counseling and Human Development, to begin in the fall of 1975, is now being considered. This program would be aimed at the preparation of applied workers in counseling with groups and individuals and in institutions.

What happened to the psychologist who did not enter any of the above-mentioned programs but who still wanted to practice psychotherapy? A few individuals went to other countries to receive some form of training, through graduate courses, internships, workshops, supervision, etc., and returned to Mexico to work and teach, often with a broader and fresher approach to training. They found themselves in the position of the ugly duckling in search of a family, until they made their way in the field by means of the quality of their work, thus terminating the "ostracism" imposed by some of their colleagues.

As a reaction against the chronic frustration, the lack of research, and the control and stature of the many analysts, philosophers, and psychiatrists on the staff of the main and oldest psychology program of the U.N.A.M., flocks of behavior therapists led a revolt against the "subjective." These therapists fiercely fought for and obtained key positions in many psychology departments, mainly at the National University and at other important universities outside the Federal District. Eventually the psychoanalysts and psychiatrists were either forced to leave or reduced to a small political and academic position in these institutions. Nonetheless, in some universities throughout the country, one is still likely to find psychology programs in the hands of psychiatrists and even general medical doctors.

The young generation of behaviorists traded in Freud for Skinner. They have given evidence of carrying their dogmatic point of view to dangerous extremes, inasmuch as they are attacking and

reducing the role and training of the clinical psychologist, whose image they associate closely with their former teachers. On the other hand, these young "behavior mod" graduates render their services in places where the more classical therapists entered with disdain—if at all—such as with persons from the lower socio-economic classes. Many schools for the mentally retarded, penitentiaries, homes for the elderly, etc. have for the first time seen psychologists who are eager to test their knowledge and apply the science of psychology. They have gained a position of respect and acceptance by a segment of the general population due to the fast results obtained in the treatment or removal of symptoms, which ironically is what the medical model has offered to this population, namely the expectation of "psychological medicine."

Extremists in some respects as some of them may be, behavior therapists are always welcomed in the psychotherapeutic family. The same cannot be said for another group of graduates from schools of psychology, psychiatry, social work, education, etc., who rent an office, get some furniture, and advertise themselves as psychotherapists, without any sort of training or supervision. Unfortunately, since adequate legislation on these issues does not exist, not much can be done about such persons. The various institutes and associations responsible for the training in psychotherapy hardly communicate or work together. Theoretical and personal disagreements have led to a situation where each program becomes an island in itself, thus making it difficult to unite in order to defend common interests and to solve the various problems that affect the practice of psychotherapy by psychologists. Among such problems is the opposition presented by some members of neighboring professions who have become entrenched in certain institutions and who make it difficult for the psychologist to practice psychotherapy there. Fortunately there are others who recognize the training of psychologists and make room for competition and professional exchange of ideas and techniques. The need for practitioners in the field is tremendous; even if the approximately 60 therapists who have graduated from our training programs were to give up their private practice in order to render their services in various institutions, one would still find that, for a country of over 50 million inhabitants, the needs of those needing and seeking help could not be satisfied. The problem is increased by the fact that most psychotherapists tend to concentrate in the nation's capital, where all the major training programs are located. In order to deal with this problem, some institutions are forced to assign patients for intensive psychotherapy to badly trained young psychologists and psychiatrists. The results lead, obviously, to disappointment concerning the effectiveness of therapy, as well as to the increased use and abuse of electric shock.

Referrals for psychologists practicing psychotherapy follow an interesting pattern. Generally, a psychoanalyst or a psychiatrist will refer a patient for therapy only to a psychologist who was graduated from his own training institute. Colleagues, former patients, lectures, and university students often become the best "letters of reference" for a psychologist. A contributing factor in referrals for psychologists is that one often finds individuals who are less reluctant to see a psychologist because his public image is not associated with work with psychotics. "I didn't see a psychiatrist because I'm not crazy" is an opinion we psychologists sometimes hear in our office. On the other hand, the "machismo" syndrome is not too conducive towards many individuals who need treatment accepting it, since they consider it to be for the "weak, sentimental and feminine." It is true that more women seek psychotherapy than do men. We also tend to see more and more young adults and adolescents in treatment, in part due to the fact that more than 50% of the population in Mexico is under 25 years of age.

When we look at the changes that have occurred in the past two decades, we are led to conclude that the future looks promising. The psychologist is gradually coming out of his professional adolescence with a more defined conception of what he wants and where he can get it, as well as an awareness of the efforts and responsibility involved in reaching his objectives. He no longer looks up to the models imposed by other professions. Many university programs have upgraded the quality of teaching and research. Although the lack of good libraries and professional journals is appalling, many of our students are kept up to date anyway, often by the assignment of a bibliography in languages other than Spanish. These papers are translated and passed around to the non-bilingual students in lieu of official Spanish translations, which have been very slow is becoming available.

Training programs in psychotherapy have also improved their teaching and admission standards. They have begun to overcome such problems as are presented by an inefficient educational system which extends from the elementary school level to the university level, by procrastination, and by the temptation to make money fast and without going through the rigors of training and personal psychotherapy.

Additional training programs are being considered. Even Freudian psychoanalysts are planning to admit some Ph.D. candidates into their training. Gestalt therapy, transactional analysis, encounter techniques, etc. are being practiced in many psychological circles. We continue to treat persons from the higher socioeconomic classes in private practice, but we are also gradually moving into other applied fields to treat persons from other backgrounds,

such as blue-collar workers and campesinos. We are being consulted more often by leaders who are earnestly concerned about the mental health needs of the general population. Ours is a time when we cannot afford to become alienated from the problems of our society. There are simply not enough trained specialists to handle the consequences of rapid social changes, poverty, ignorance, inflation, environmental contamination, etc. Although we don't have a panacea to offer, our presence is becoming important in the decision-making process of teams of specialists attempting to reduce the intensity of existing problems. Some of us could benefit from the interaction with the reality of the needs of our society by, at least on occasions, leaving the sanctuary of our offices. I do not foresee the disappearance of individual modalities of psychotherapy, but it is also true that group psychotherapy and other schemes for helping more people are likely to acquire more strength and popularity in Mexico.

The ideal training program would, in this author's opinion, be one in which research, training and services are combined, and one in which the future psychotherapist could choose a major school or orientation to form the core of his training and supervision. This preferred orientation could be combined with an adequate knowledge of other techniques whenever the reality of the patients' needs and environment required them. I hope such a program will become a reality in the not too distant future. Various leaders in the field of psychotherapy have expressed interest in overcoming the communication barrier, and plan to get together to work on this idea. It is about time for a fruitful reunion of the various members of the psychotherapeutic family. The project is not too unrealistic; through our combined efforts, we might even agree on this suggested name for the modality: "Utopian Psychotherapy."

In comparison to other Latin American countries, there exists a freedom of expression in our country at the professional level, since any association between two or more persons for therapeutic purposes takes place with entire liberty, this not being the case in some other countries. The government up to now does not consider this type of activity as undermining its security. Any therapist can work in accordance with his or her desired orientation and frame of reference.

On the other hand, we find with increasing frequency that mental health people are invited to function as consultants and participate actively in programs involving social change and improvement organized by different governmental agencies. This calls into question the border between completely independent therapeutic activity, and mental health activity as part of value-laden social change.

As far as psychotherapy and the church is concerned, there are two marked basic tendencies. On one hand there exist some dog-

matic religious authorities who do not approve of the existence of psychotherapists, since their presence is considered as being a drastic interference with the role exercised by representatives of the church. Their concern is that due to psychotherapy our patients might become "liberal and atheistic," gradually becoming more dependent on themselves than on God or religion. They are opposed to and concerned with how the psychotherapist handles matters such as birth control, abortion, "changing morals," premarital sex, etc. On those occasions when reality strikes hard and the need for treatment is undeniable, a religiously devout therapist is recommended by such clergymen.

This situation occurs to a large extent outside of Mexico City, although it is not infrequent in the nation's capital. Fortunately, this situation is balanced by those church people who enter some form of training in pastoral psychology, counseling or similar programs, and learn to trust that patients will solve life problems free of prejudice for or against the church.

As this article is being revised, new programs in psychotherapy are being formed. The Universidad Iberoamericana has approved a doctoral program for lay counselors in Rogerian therapy as well as a Diploma in Rogerian counseling in the school of psychology. The Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México is starting a program at the Master's level where the students will get a general overview in psychotherapy as well as an introduction to some individual and group techniques, with the hope that the students will eventually receive a more advanced and specialized training. An eclectic training program in psychotherapy including local and international supervisors is being organized by the author of this article to be started early in 1976.

FOOTNOTE

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