

Integrative Paper

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According to an article about counseling and consultation from North Michigan University, group counseling sessions usually consist of small amounts of people who meet regularly to discuss, interact and explore problems with each other and the group leader(s). The common goal of group counseling is to give clients a safe and comfortable place where they can work out problems and address their emotional concerns with the assistance of a professional and their peers. I learned about several theories when it comes to group counseling, in this paper I will explore some of them.

Psychoanalytic is defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as a therapeutic method, originated by Sigmund Freud, for treating mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the patient's mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind, using techniques such as dream interpretation and free association. Psychoanalytic therapy became well known during the World War I and World War II eras, causing Americans to migrate to Europe to study and train under the originators. Psychoanalytic therapy is talk therapy that focuses on the relationship between the therapist and client to reveal past thoughts and feelings to deal with present traumas. The dynamic is likened to the bond of a parent and child, such as in attachment theory. Attachment theory can be characterized as an invisible bond formed in relationships between individuals. Early experiences can shape a person's future relationships both intimate and otherwise. Clients should seek a licensed professional therapist with whom they feel comfortable talking to and confiding in for the best outcomes.

Gestalt theory originated in Austria and Germany in the 20th century, developed by Fritz Perls, Laura Perls, and Paul Goodman in the 1940s, it is an experimental form of therapy. Gestalt is loosely translated in English as 'form' or 'shaped'. It focuses on the perception of a patient and the importance of the whole of something as opposed to parts of it, this therapy has a more holistic approach. It seeks to add a human aspect to an otherwise sterile outlook on the study of the mind.

Gestalt seeks to focus on the present, the here and now by asking more 'what and how' to understand the thought process of the client. The purpose is to get in touch with their emotions and feelings to define events of their past and how that can affect their future. Gestalt seeks to recognize that clients are not fragments of people, but to understand all aspects of their life, past and present, knowing that these events can alter the trajectory of their lives. This therapy practices techniques such as the 'empty chair' exercise. The empty chair exercise consists of the person attending therapy sitting across from an empty chair, imagining they are engaged in a conversation with someone significant in their lives such as a spouse, parent, child, or even a boss. This allows the clinician the opportunity to observe their emotions, behaviors, and thought process of the person in therapy. This technique is used to address 'unfinished business' with this significant person. It helps to expose suppressed emotions and feelings for the person attending therapy. Addressing these issues allows the client to progress in an emotionally healthy way. Gestalt also focuses on personal energy in therapy, knowing how to detect, direct and deter energy is a skill that clinicians using this type of therapy must acquire. Clients may not recognize that their energy is offsetting the therapy process, Gestalt therapists are trained to assist the clients and bring it to their awareness. Gestalt leaders are also tasked with creating safe spaces for the clients to be receptive to this type of mind-shifting approach.

Person-centered therapy, also known as Rogerian therapy, was developed in the 1940s by Carl Rogers, an American psychologist. Person-centered therapy allows the person in therapy to take the lead as the expert in their lives. Rogers believed that everyone has a view of their lives and that view should be valued and trusted. This therapy hinges on three conditions: therapists are required to remain empathetic, understanding the client's thoughts and feelings, also they should be positive and non-judgemental to encourage clients to make their own decisions. Therapists also should not display an authoritarian stance but are to display honesty and transparency, this allows clients the space to make decisions for themselves. This technique empowers the client to

take the lead in their therapy process, thus discovering the solutions for their issues. It gives them a sense of ownership and self-confidence, the therapist's main focus is to lead the client in the therapeutic process without interrupting their embarking on self-discovery.

According to an article in Healthline, existential therapy assists people to find meaning and purpose in their lives. Soren Kierkegaard was one of the first developers of existential theory, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre helped to further develop the ideas that Kierkegaard put into place. The core of existential therapy says that life is ever-changing and so should people, we must decide in every moment what and who we want to be. Existential therapy is used for issues that clients have in four distinct areas, which are death, meaninglessness, isolation, freedom, or a responsibility to make the best choices. Clients are given tools and direction and goals are set to help them get over their challenges in these areas. Existential therapy is talk therapy that seeks to steer a client's thought process towards the possibilities and future instead of the events and thoughts of the past that did not serve them well. The goal of this type of therapy is to assist clients in finding meaning and worth in their lives. Clients will ultimately make positive choices and not spend their lives in fear and worry.

Solution Brief therapy was developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Berg at the Milwaukee, Wisconsin Brief Family Therapy Center. It is a short-term approach that focuses on the future and engages in minimal discussion about the client's history. The goal is to create positive change within clients by helping them to envision the future by asking the questions of what will be different or what can be different. The solution can be unrelated to how the problem began, one does not necessarily need to know the history of the problem. Hindered in efforts to solve problems, locked in negative views of the problems, instead of trying new approaches continue old methods. It is thought that people do want to change for the better so it is the job of the therapist to help them talk about potential solutions, allowing them to select their own goals. They work with clients to restore the appropriate skills to address their problems, focusing on the

solutions instead of the problems, by finding the positives instead of focusing on the negatives of the issues.

A theoretical orientation is the counselor's belief of how problems develop and how they are solved or treated. It also shapes the counselor's basis in each session, the goals of counseling, and the perceived interventions you will use in your counseling sessions with your clients. In other words, your theoretical orientation as a counselor sets the foundation for what the therapy sessions will be built upon. In my experience of facilitating group counseling at my internship, I know that I am a big personality and can sometimes be overpowering and intimidating, that approach does not work for everyone. I have had clients tell me after the session that they appreciate me and they were able to gain something substantial from the session but I have also watched clients shrink in my sessions. As a counselor, you have to read the room and use a method or multiple methods so you are effective towards everyone in the group. From my observations, the Corey's were able to utilize multiple techniques in their group sessions. At one point in the video, they were able to apply a person-centered approach, to pull back and allow the clients to tell their story in their words, allowing them to be seen and heard and clients opened up with no hesitation. In other areas of the session, they applied the Gestalt theory, where they practiced a variation of the empty chair technique, where they assumed the role of the person that the client wanted to confront or have a conversation with to explain aspects of their lives. Clients reported feeling better and relieved during that session, it was a way of helping them to get issues off of their minds and also practice what they will say to that specific person when they are ready for the exchange.

I seek to be a more person-centered therapist, allowing the clients to tell their life stories as they see them because they are the experts of their lives. The person-centered approach allows clients to freely speak about issues as they become comfortable with the assurance that the therapist is listening and is not being judgemental. My role as a counselor is to provide the

clients with a safe space to share their thoughts and feelings without the fear of being deemed less than anyone else. The therapist must establish a relationship with their clients where they feel comfortable to bear their true selves. Therapists also have to set boundaries following the NASW Code of Ethics and the practice for which they are employed. Boundaries may be centered around a variety of things such as the language used during the sessions, technology usage, effective communication styles, and attendance are some examples. Setting boundaries is a way to keep order and peace for everyone involved in the counseling sessions. Some sessions may seem awkward to the clients because they are essentially strangers to each other, it is the role of the therapist to initiate and stimulate conversations between the group members. Communication fosters a positive and effective counseling session, clients will be able to gain the best experience if they are guided on how to share and listen actively. Therapists are also required to keep the sessions confidential, nothing said in the counseling should be discussed with anyone outside of the group unless a member of the group has disclosed that they will hurt themselves or others. Counselors are expected to acknowledge clients and build a rapport with them, the client-therapist relationship is imperative to the success of the sessions. Therapists meet the clients where they are and build from there. You can not start a person off in college if they are four years old, you have to stay cognizant of the mental capacity of your client. Protecting the life of the client and others is also imperative, preventing known dangers is a serious responsibility. Therapists must report any threats or plans of harm to the proper authorities, preserving lives are paramount. Supporting the client's choice to self-determination is a top priority, therapists are tasked to guide clients through their process not make decisions, they have the freedom to decide how they want to live their lives.

Group members are expected to be honest with their therapist, they cannot assist clients who are withholding information from them, the process will not work. Respecting other group

members, the therapist and everyone involved in their therapeutic processes are of optimal importance.

The therapeutic goals and developmental tasks of counseling differ for each client but they should all have a couple of commonalities. Some of the goals are to facilitate behavioral change in clients, the purpose of counseling is to retrain your thought process. Another goal is to help improve the client's ability to both establish and maintain relationships. Counseling also helps enhance the client's ability to cope with daily situations in life. It also enhances the decision-making process for clients, it becomes more bearable.

The developmental tasks should be SMART which is an acronym for specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Specific explores what the client wants to accomplish, the decision is theirs to figure out what is most important to them. Measurable asks how do you know when it is accomplished. Achievable allows you to make a plan of how you will accomplish the task. Relevant allows you to examine if the task is worthwhile, is the task worth the time and effort. Time bounds allow you to place an expected time frame on your tasks.

There are five essential stages to the evolution of a group, these stages shape the group from start to finish. The first stage is the forming stage, where the group is setting the ground rules and finding the commonalities among themselves. The second stage is called storming, the group is handling issues of power, control, and differences. The third stage which is known as norming allows the group to manage their conflicts by finding the things that the group has in common, recurring similarities. Stage four is where the group displays their abilities to function effectively, this is called performing. The fifth and final stage is where the group seeks closure and this is called adjourning. Initially, group members will question themselves during the span of their process, Why am I here? Who are these people? What are we supposed to accomplish? What are they expecting of me? What is appropriate and inappropriate?

My experience with working in my small group was pleasant, thankfully. I can be a very authoritarian type of person, twenty-six years in the military and being a leader for fifteen of those years has instilled these qualities in me but this group was very self-sufficient. In the absence of a group member or even the leader, the remaining group members were able to facilitate the meetings as usual. There was always a sense of personal power with each leader appointed to each presentation. Everyone displayed self-confidence and an awareness of their position and influence over the group (Corey, 2016 p.16). My group was very supportive of each other, there were no power struggles and disagreements within the group. There was always a willingness to challenge ourselves and if that was not displayed another member had no problem challenging you to push you to your full potential. Everyone was sincere and authentic in their feedback, which proved to be useful as evident by the grades we received for our multiple group presentations. We all displayed our inventiveness and creativity in multiple ways, mine was the editing and designing of the layouts of the slides, another group member was able to organize minutes from each meeting to send out to the group. We all contributed in positive ways, no one took advantage of the fact that they were group projects no one tried to avoid their portion of the work. During each group, we took the time to check in with each other as a form of self-care. We were able to discuss any issues that we were having trouble with and also share any praise reports that we had. We also extended these opportunities to each other daily, if we needed clarity, help, encouragement, or just sharing a joke, the space was available to us via our text messages.

There was an initial sense of anxiety for myself upon entering the group. I am an MSW Advanced Standing student which means I was only at the college for two semesters as opposed to other students who completed their undergraduate degree there too. I had never met any of the students in person before being in a group with them so everyone was strangers to me. I not only had to be a leader for strangers but I also had to deal with personalities that were very different

from mine. I had to make sure to curb my harsh humor and sharp tongue so as not to accidentally offend anyone and detract from the dynamics of this group of people that I had to work with every week. I am used to working in a group of people, from my job at the police department and my years of being a soldier but those are all people that I knew before working together. The pandemic hindered our in-person contact but we had to keep forging forward. I had to learn the people I was now expected to labor within the capacity of education. There was no agenda in place, from the start of this process the group was able to flow and get the job done without a hiccup. The group was pretty diverse as far as ethnicity, consisting of Hispanics, Caucasians, and African Americans, all females, from different backgrounds. We did a good job of being culturally competent and inclusive. No one reported feeling insulted culturally or being left out of specific aspects of the group process.

As a group we did not have many changes to make, we had a solid virtual plan in place from the beginning. One person was tasked with sending out the link and reminders for the meetings, depending on who is presenting that person would lead the meetings and organize the flow of the meeting and facilitate the presentation on their assigned day. There were no issues with countertransference as far as I could tell. Everyone was very upfront with their feelings for a particular subject from the color of the slides to the information that was put on the slides. For our adjourning meeting, we were able to express the admiration and pride we feel towards each other. There was no bickering during the meetings, disagreements were handled professionally so there were no unresolved personal concerns left unattended. The plans for the group are to continue the social work circle that we started by keeping in touch with each other and being a safe haven for one another.

As a leader during this group process has allowed me the opportunity to sharpen my active listening skills. I have learned that listening for understanding as opposed to answering is more important than having a fast answer. Understanding allows you the ability to comprehend

and process what is being said to you, we might not have all of the answers but we can research what the person needs once we have an understanding of the problem. Also making sure to include everyone in the conversations, planning, processing, and execution of everything that is entailed in the group. As a group member, I have learned that the leader has the immense responsibility to shoulder the burden of making sure the goals are met so the more participation, collaboration, and implementation that is contributed to the task the faster we can achieve the intended goal and the better it will be. Teamwork is paramount to make sure the group works for all of the members. I will work on these skills by showing up for every group that I become a part of. Making sure that I support the leader by informing them of the good job they are doing and also if I have a difference in opinion. Leadership does not mean you have all of the correct answers every time, your group members may have valuable information to add to the group if they are allowed to express their opinions. Leaders should be aware that continuous work on their skills is an asset that can benefit the group as a whole, this is achieved through training, studying and applying the information that you have learned.

Diversity in group counseling is common, it should be embraced and nurtured. No two people are the same and they should not be treated as if they are not valuable to the process of counseling. Space should be held to understand the diversity in the group and also taught to the other members of the group. Diverse is a great way to explain my group, again although we are all female, there were Caucasians, Hispanics, Caribbean, and African American members of the group. A woman from a Caribbean country may think and believe differently from a caucasian woman but the ultimate goal is to understand and respect everyone in the group. We all got along pretty well and were very careful to respect each other and we did our best to strive to understand each other's unique points of view. I have researched the following four personality traits: driver- fact-based extrovert, analytical- fact-based introvert, amiable- relationship introvert, and expressive- relationship extrovert. Out of the four, I have concluded

that I am definitely a driver. Drivers have very strong personalities. They have a go-get-it-done or whatever-it-takes way about them. They tend to seem very dominant and are quicker to take action than others. The negative is they can sometimes come across as stubborn or arrogant. Sometimes their personality types can come across as brash, they are seen as someone who will run over others to get the tasks accomplished. In my opinion, my group consisted of three drivers, we were more boisterous, vibrant, and spirited, tending to take the lead more than other group members. Drivers are sometimes seen as overbearing, controlling, and 'too much'. Oftentimes drivers have a hard time giving up control of the reins to other people, we desire control of things so we know the exact direction in which things are moving. Two group members could be seen as expressive, they seemed to be "natural" people persons, seeking out relationships with everyone they come in contact with. They enjoy socializing and talking and often seek to please people. They also are good at communicating vision, getting others excited about ideas and issues. They sometimes cannot be relied upon to get things done having to be reminded that they are a part of the group and they should participate and give their input during the meetings. There was one amiable member, typically calm, flat-type personalities. Amiable types are laid back and are hard to show emotions such as excitement, often seen as relaxed people who desire a peaceful environment over anything else. They will go out of their way to please people and keep them happy. Their indifference can often upset the people they are trying to appease because you are not sure where they stand on any given subject. Amiable people usually wait until the last minute to make a decision and will often go with what everyone else is doing. The last personality trait is analytical, there was one member who would be considered as such. It is said that most will fit with this personality type, our group was blessed with one of them. Analytical personality types are constantly evaluating, weighing the pros and cons, making to-do lists of outstanding items. Analytical types are constantly asking questions, almost to the point of getting too much information. People can see them as talented with brilliant ideas.

However, they can overanalyze situations too much which can cause stress. Although we are all different, we got along well, balancing out each other's personalities. Introverts and extroverts were equally yoked in my group due to our mutual respect for one another.

A group works effectively together once they agree to complete a common task in an agreed time, each member contributes to the team according to the tasks they were assigned upon entering the group. Planning is completed as a group and you are given direction to help you coordinate your work for it to be efficient. The experience of the small group taught me that communication is paramount, it can make or break your group. Constant and clear communication enhances your group experience, participants tend to share more once they feel heard and seen by their group members. My group has taught me to include everyone in the group in the discussions by inviting them rather than pushing them in. People who feel pushed into partaking in the group may retreat and shut down, as opposed to someone who is invited to share. Also offering assistance to someone may help them tremendously to know that they are now part of a community that will support them when they need it. Everyone will not feel comfortable asking for help, sometimes it may need to be extended by other members of the group.

My group encountered most of the stages of group development, of course, we were formed by our professor, our members were chosen for us. The storming stage was not difficult at all, my group members and I did not struggle with power or authority during any of our sessions, we each stepped up, did work, and even assisted each other when we were needed. The norming stages where conflicts are managed was not a stage that we visited, there were no conflicts in our group. Even when colleagues were not able to attend a zoom meeting they were told what portion of the presentation they were expected to complete and they graciously accepted it with no problem. The performing stage was the easiest, we are a group of intelligent women who have been in school for a couple of years so we pretty much had the hang of

presenting. One group member revealed that she was nervous before the presentation and the rest of the group took the time out to encourage her to remind her that she is more than capable to lead our group during the presentation. She eventually was comfortable enough to present and she did a great job at it. During the adjourning stage, we had our last virtual meeting where we spoke of staying in touch with each other, gave each other our flowers for the great presentations and teamwork throughout the semester, congratulated each other on our upcoming graduation, and encouraged the colleagues who are not graduating yet to study hard and continue to excel as they did during our group time. There were no hindrances during our development stages, the team held each other up.

Trust was established during the first meeting once everyone was able to gain a visual representation of everyone's academic ability. It was slow because we were essentially strangers to each other but the trust was built by the end of our hour and a half meeting. It was discussed that it was hard to allow someone else's performance during a presentation to dictate what grade you would ultimately receive in the class which fueled everyone to perform at an optimal level. We all decided that since the burden of everyone's grades depended on each other we would do our absolute best and when that was not possible someone else will step up or step in.

The shift of co-leaders did not negatively impact the group at all. The order of presentation was chosen before we were done with our first meeting and a text was sent out in regards so there were no miscommunications. My group did not encounter any conflict during our meetings. I did not experience any resistance in any areas of working in my group. During groups, there were clear cut areas that we were all assigned but I learned that if you can help another member you should, it ultimately benefits the whole team. At a point during a presentation I was sharing my screen and did not realize that my slides were no longer visible but before I was able to find out another group member began to share her slides and the presentation was seamless. That was a turning point for me establishing the fact that I can trust

and lean on my group knowing they will be right there to pick up the slack and encourage me in the process. It gave me hope and assurance in my group members and our ability to work as a team.

Focusing on the different theories every week helped us to learn them even more and rediscover what we already learned in class. We were able to do extra research to further our understanding of what was taught to us. The extra research helped present to the class and we were able to also teach them something they did not know previously.

My main takeaway from this class was that one modality will not work for the whole group, you may have to use multiple theories in one group. People are different and will not require the same things along their processes. Everyone is at differing stages of their lives and will need the therapist to meet them where they are at that moment. If the process is rushed or slowed down it will not work for most people. Therapists are tasked with guiding clients through their process, they must maintain patience at all times, you may have to take a couple of steps backward before going forward. Therapists help patients deal with mental and emotional issues by conducting specific therapies and exercises for clients and developing plans for their aftercare to improve their thought process.

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