

Reflection Paper 2: Group Therapy

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Counseling training is a constant and lifelong process (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

A personal group experience is necessary for counseling training and development (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). In addition, the mock group session offered an opportunity to practice what I knew intellectually (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

Facilitating a mock grief support group of eight peers was an overwhelming experience. I felt nervous being observed by my class instructor and classmates and fearful of making mistakes. According to Yalom & Leszcz (2005), it is normal to feel "discomfort while being observed" (p. 545). Furthermore, at the beginning of any new group, all individuals are "strangers to one another" (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 118). Like a client, the group facilitator experiences how vital acceptance of the group is, understands how difficult it is to be vulnerable, and learns to value their strengths and weaknesses.

Ultimately, the facilitator is the cohesive tape that sets up the other relationships within the group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Therefore, while facilitating the grief support group, my primary focus was to connect different individuals to establish a solid foundation of trust. In the end, this exercise gave me insight into our facilitator's experience with every "new" group she facilitates, including ours. Even after years of counseling experience, every group will be unique due to the distinct client personalities coming together.

A group experience with peers improves "relationships and communication within the trainee class and, thus, enrich the entire educational experience" (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 554). For instance, I was comfortable to share that I did not connect with my facilitator's group structure in our Friday class. Consequently, one significant intervention was building up the courage to share my feelings about the group with the facilitator. According to Corey et al.

(2018), "constructive confrontation is a form of feedback that is a basic part of a productive group, and also of any healthy relationship" (p. 299).

Unfortunately, when I shared what I needed from the group, the facilitator became defensive and responded in a passive-aggressive manner. The facilitator's response made me feel unseen, misunderstood, and singled out. After this incident, I found myself the group's focus and often felt like a target in future meetings. Therefore my impression of the group facilitator negatively changed because one of the therapist's responsibilities was to create a supportive atmosphere for development (Yalom & Lesczcz, 2005). Furthermore, I saw the facilitator as flawed and unaware of her reactions within the group, and I wanted nothing to do with group therapy. However, with the probing of the class instructor, I resolved the conflict by sharing my feelings with the facilitator. In turn, the facilitator acknowledged that she was defensive and could have handled the situation better. She also apologized for making me feel unheard.

Therefore my impression of the group facilitator changed yet again. This time it became more positive. An integral quality of an effectual group leader is courage (Corey et al., 2018). Courage is demonstrated by admitting mistakes, staying present to work out conflicts, and being sincere with members in a humbling manner (Corey et al., 2018). When the group "constructively deals with conflict in the group, therapy is enhanced in many ways" (Yalom & Lesczcz, 2005, p 72). Through this experience, I learned that it is better to share my feelings than regret not sharing them at all. Surprisingly, the facilitator changed her leading strategy in the following session. Unfortunately, it was session eleven, and we only had one more session before termination. However, the small change helped the group have a great session, and I deeply connected with my group members.

The termination of the group was anticlimactic. I have been waiting for the end of this group since session three. According to Corey et al. (2018), the final phase of the group should be for members to share what the group experience has meant for them and process their feelings about the whole experience. In our group, each member thanked the facilitator for a great group and was sad it was at an end. On the other hand, I felt relief and happiness that it was finally over! In Friday's class, one of my group peers brought up the idea that perhaps the outcome of the group could have been different if we had another facilitator with the same group members. That idea looms over me, and I wish I knew whether it was the facilitator's personality, the group's structure, or the group members that made the group what it was?

Group therapy is forecasted to flourish by managed health care because individual counseling will not meet the critical mental health needs of the communities at large (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). It is also forecasted that more structured and time-limited groups will emerge due to health insurance policies favoring evidence-based practice methodologies. Therefore, group approaches will be relied upon more heavily (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Even though group therapy gives me anxiety due to the heaviness of being a group leader, having less control, being afraid to make mistakes in a bigger capacity, and possibly doing more paperwork (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). However, I see myself doing group therapy at some point in my career.

Furthermore, preparing for the mock grief session made me realize that it is special working with individuals who have experienced loss; it is inevitable and painful no matter the circumstances. Grief is complex and misunderstood because it is different for everybody. After all, it is an "individual experience." I believe that I could be a good grief counselor with proper training assisting individuals who are lost in their despair, loneliness, anger, guilt, shame, and sadness, accept what has happened, work through their emotions and move on with their lives.

References

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