

Reflection Paper 1

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Group Dynamics has taught me much more than I had thought it would. I am finding it challenging and beneficial to my development as a counselor. The requirement of group therapy has been a large part of that. My overall experience with group therapy started in college with an eating disorders' group as a participant and then leading alcohol and drug group therapy 25 years ago for several years. The world has changed in 25 years and I have as well. Because of this and because of the Master's classes I have taken, any groups I lead from this point on will be much more complex and have much more depth than my experiences in the past. For this reason, the group therapy requirement of the Group Dynamics class has been a welcome experience. The group met five times and I have attended each session and learned much.

To being with, the two differences I am experiencing which any group I run will not most likely not experience are the fact that the "clients" are my fellow students and we know each other, and also we don't have an "issue" that is bringing us together. Knowing each other has led to a few unexpected lessons including, one person who talks a lot in classes, has not dominated group discusses as much as I thought he would. Another is one person who is working during class, and has to turn on and off his camera throughout group, contributes wonderfully and brings group to a deeper level despite this. And finally, a new person added to the closed group after two sessions, fit in seamlessly. This showed me I cannot make assumptions and I believe this lesson works with any group therapy. I must sit in a posture of humility and learnedness in any group sessions I lead.

Group therapy has many moving parts. One on one therapy seems to be simpler than group and more assumptions and conjectures can be used and specific questions asked because of this simplicity. A question I would not hesitate to ask in one on one therapy, I potentially

would not even ask in a group setting. Also in group therapy a client could be reacting to any number of stimuli, and not necessarily the person who is talking. There is less perception of control and I believe less control in group therapy than individual therapy by the leader as well. Right now it seems as though this is part of the beauty of group therapy. It's real. It imitates the real world better than individual therapy does. Behaviors happen in group and can be addressed at the time with perhaps five other people who can share their experience of the behavior. That alone makes group therapy more difficult but priceless.

I can identify a few lessons our group leader has modeled; silence and she also asks certain people what they think about the subject being talked about at different points. Beyond that, it's still too early to pinpoint any other techniques. I also noticed small things do matter as a leader. I am able to be self-discerning and realize what is happening but my respect for the counselor definitely went down each time she didn't know how to use the technology we were using. Again I was able to notice my thoughts and alter them by being honest about the full picture which includes sometimes little annoyances help bring out sides to people we don't normally see and can be helpful in a group setting so that behaviors that are unhelpful, can be addressed when they happen or the fact that some people I'm sure didn't even notice. I noticed so that means it's my issue. This is a complex but important lesson.

I have also noticed I am better at seeing the forest than the trees in group therapy. After my first group I wanted to begin focusing on individuals more, their behaviors or themes, what was important to them. I have not done so yet. I appear to focus on the group as a whole more, missing what individuals are going through because of this. My focus is on making the group even and avoiding ups and downs which are often where the best work in a group gets done. I can identify my unhelpful internal desire to make things easier for everyone and also my

unhelpful desire to guess what each client would like to happen and then act on that idea. These are unhealthy instincts that I must be aware of when leading. Sitting in silence is important but so is sitting in uncomfortableness. I need to let the group find its feet on its own to some extent and model the behavior of respecting the group because it's everyone's group not just mine and continue to look for the underlying tones and behaviors.

The last group was very focused and full of meaningful dialog. Our conversation was in response to a video we watched that hit a nerve in everyone in group and so we discussed it almost the entire time. It seems like this was more of a true group than the others we have had because we had something to talk about, a shared experience. The video brought out many cultural difficulties bias and discrimination have had on the diverse members of our group. I'm not sure how much people who shared their difficulties felt better after having shared them. This instilled in me the need to let clients share when they are ready to share and not before. Again, don't make assumptions. This also gave me an opportunity to put myself in the place of the leader and try to work out how I, as a white female, could or should respond to a Latino male or any other person from a different experience than mine. And to put myself in their shoes in a small way to better understand how to help them and in turn help others.

All of the prior points mentioned show that a lot of what matters to me or I think is important, is not necessarily important to the health of the group. All of these instances have given me real life examples to look back on when leading my own group. They have humbled me and led me to respect a less directing approach even while I do my best to step in when necessary and also continually ask for feedback from the group.