

Jeremy Gillentine—September 26, 2024

COUC710-- Discussion Three: Yalom, chapters 5-7 Discussion Thread: The Group Counselor

Original Post--Our textbook said, “Throughout the life of the group, the members are involved in a struggle for position on the hierarchy of dominance. At times, the conflict around control and dominance is flagrant; at other times, quiescent. But it never vanishes and should be explored in therapy...” (Yalom et al., pg. 197).

Question:

Has it been your experience that there is indeed this constant struggle of dominance? If yes, how did you handle it and what were the results? If no, do you know what allowed or caused the lack of the struggle for dominance in the group? Was the presence of or lack of this attribute a positive or a negative in your group?

Yalom, I. D.; Leszcz, M. (2020). *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) (p. 197). Basic Books. Kindle Edition.

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First Question Response

On page 227 of our text, Yalom and Leszcz (2020) highlight the need for the therapist to demonstrate the intense emotional experience provides an opportunity for learning. They suggested that the session could be split into the experiential portion and the analysis of that segment. When teaching process to our students, how do we help them overcome the resistance

to digging into the feelings and or emotional experiences of the group members? Experienced group leaders have no problem helping the group members accept observations, different opinions, and even push back, where the student, as expected, finds it intimidating.

I particularly enjoyed this week's reading and did not feel burdened at all by the reading. I cannot wait to attempt some of the techniques and intend to sit in with two of my students as they lead the anger management group this week.

Yalom, I. D., & Leszcz, M. (2020). *The Theory and practice of group psychotherapy*. Hachette UK.

This is a common issue for students to either miss the cues to follow up with an emotion or feeling statement or to choose to avoid it for fear of making a misstep that may lead to an awkward encounter. My first thought on how to handle this is by an intentional demonstration and discussion regarding the need for and benefits of acknowledgement of feelings and emotional content in counseling whether individual or group. Educating the student about the potential gold mine opportunity that can be found in such discussions is essential to the teaching process for counselors.

Givropoulou & Tseliou (2021) share some thoughts on “reflexivity” as used in systemic family therapy group. The general idea they share regarding reflexivity is a process of reviewing student sessions and discussing them openly to help work through the positive and less positive aspects of sessions. They share multiple participant responses with one of them from P3 who indicates a value of the reflexivity exercise is helping someone with a “lack of experience” to

have a resource to “deal with it and review it...and this keeps me going”. Later in the article it is said that this idea of reflexivity helps to deal with “uncomfortable emotions” and helps give the counselor empowerment and...personal agency, resilience and resourcefulness”.

I would say the review process that typically takes place in counseling skills classes are spot on but need intentionality regarding the implementation of seeing emotions and feelings as the treasure they are and to learn to run to them rather than skipping over them.

## **Reference**

Givropoulou, D., & Tseliou, E. (2021). Developing reflexivity through group processes in psychotherapy training: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of systemic family therapy trainees’ experience. *Family Process*, 60(2), 346-360. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12600>

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Second question response

In Chapter 6, Yalom outlines an example of storming in the group setting when the group responds to the knowledge that two members, Tim and Marjorie, are having a sexual affair (2020). One member was particularly disturbed by this and shared her criticism towards Tim and Marjorie (Yalom, 2020). In situations where group members become agitated and verbalize anger with one another, what can the therapist do to encourage mutual respect among members while working to return to a state of group cohesion?

Reference:

Yalom, I. D., & Leszcz, M. (2020). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy*, (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Basic Books.

A key component to a group counseling session becoming intense is the leader not becoming emotionally entrenched in the situation and able to remain calm (ish) and use intentionality to bring the heat down a few notches to a level that can be tolerated by the group. The leader not being wrapped up in the drama should allow them to use the skills they have to help draw out the real themes present in the exchange and hopefully allow for clarity and healing to occur. Inevitably, when people are together regularly and become very comfortable with one another, conflicts will arise. It is up to the group leader to remain present enough and be skilled enough to promote a time of growth. It will not always work out, but every situation is an opportunity to be better equipped for the next time such a dynamic comes about in sessions.

Black (2017) shares some insights that help me to think about the value that can be gleaned through following and exploring emotions and feelings. An event where anger occurs in a group session can be a doorway to explore these valuable categories of emotions and feelings. Further, Black modeled a very subtle method of using the information learned throughout the sessions to draw the anger response back toward the leader. This tactic allowed the group cohesion to remain intact and to work with the emotions and feelings surrounding the session event and more broadly in everyday life. This article gives a fantastic case example of a heated exchange in a group session that would send most people into a panic. The group leader handles it amazingly well and is able to turn it into a real opportunity for growth. This article that was suggested by Dr. Daniels is a must read if you intend to do group work!

## Reference

Black, A. E. (2017). On attacking and being attacked in group psychotherapy. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 67(3), 291-313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207284.2016.1260459>