

PREFACE

This text is written to address the need for an integrated theory of group therapy. The authors have observed that existing group therapy theory tends to focus either on psychodynamics of group functioning, or a here-and-now experiential focus for group interactions, but has not been able to integrate both. We provide an explanation of how psychodynamics and here-and-now processes of relating are interconnected. Additionally, we show the connection of social, family, and group structuring through the dynamics of love and power, with the natural desire for relationship that is just, that is open and inclusive.

Theories of therapy either involve ways to provide structuring that supports the therapist as authority, or negate structure in ways that make the group a kind of communal being that doesn't require leadership. Because we view the structure versus no-structure dichotomy as artificial, we present a theory that shows that the dynamics of unstructured relationship are involved in any kind of human group—simply in a less overt way when a focus on externally required structuring is provided. With this understanding, a therapist can adapt to the needs of a setting with regard to providing external structuring, and yet work with the unstructured aspects of relationship dynamics. We investigate these dynamics in terms of love, power, and justice because these key aspects of relationships are found not only within diverse cultures, but are involved when cultures interact with one another. Thus, we have formed a theory that addresses not only group therapy, but in addition the ways that human beings form groups, and interact within and through groups.

As an integrated theory, the model we propose in this text shows how phases unfold as group members allow defenses to function permeably, how and why past relationship patterns unfold in a group setting, and how here-and-now interactions form the basis of change. We not only integrate key aspects of person-centered, existential, and psychodynamic theories but include ways that cognitions and relational behaviors can change as a result of group participation. The theory of group work presented herein shows that personal integrity and integration of interpersonal dynamics at the levels of group, community, and culture are mutually interactive and supporting of each other.

The theory we present in this text integrates core constructs from person-centered and existential therapy and philosophy with psychodynamic insights. We

Unstructured Group Therapy

also show how shifting relationship dynamics change the processing of feeling-level responses, as well cognitively based beliefs about self and others. Thirdly, we integrate a perspective on interpersonal relationships that emphasizes that effective personal wholeness requires balanced relating within an inclusive arena beyond the individual. This balance within self and through interpersonal relating requires that the natural inclination toward a sense of power be co-aligned with an awareness of love. Such balance can allow a person to learn that power as an individual results when one is able to hear and include others as integral to one's sense of self and being. Group therapy is an ideal format for such learning, which embraces creative justice. A creatively just group is able to allow each member to experience being heard, valued, and to contribute according to his or her proclivities and awareness of involvement.

In order to understand the meaning that love, power, and justice have for group dynamics, a group leader must be aware within moment-to-moment interactions, and be able to encourage recognition of responsibility. The theory we present in this text values freedom as the basis for growth in awareness, and shows that responsibility can never be considered as divorced from an open and acute awareness within the process of being with self and others. Thus, freedom, responsibility, and awareness mutually imply one another, and enhance each other's functioning. Clarity about these principles—particularly when considered with respect to the integration of love, power, and justice—informs effective group leadership, as well as an understanding about relationships people form within communities and cultures.

The authors use this approach to understanding human groups in a variety of settings, and have supervised therapists in diverse settings in the use of this theory. These settings include group therapy for university students, in prison and drug abuse treatment settings, for adults in the community, and in various countries. Additionally, we use this theory in understanding supervision, and the behavior of psychologists, counselors and other helping professionals functioning in a team perspective. As this theory is applicable to formation of modes for communicating, establishing social norms, and developing roles for interpersonal behaviors, the scope of this theory potentially extends well beyond therapy to understanding diverse groups that human beings form. Issues of justice, freedom, responsibility, and power are relevant to understanding how societies form relationships. Group therapy, in this sense, is work on society by members of society who have suffered from injustice in one form or another, abuse of power, and/or withholding of love.