

***The Meaning of Evaluation in Group
Psychotherapy – from the participants’
perspective***

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1. Need for Evaluation

- Accountability to funding bodies, effectiveness of intervention
- Process for encouragement of participants and therapist involvement in and communication about intervention/treatment, and the capacity for intervention to be tailored more sensitively to the unique needs of the individual participants and the group

The phenomena:

- Evaluation more focused on symptom change/relief (though often a treatment goal)
- Most neglected on study of interpersonal change
- More for participants' perception of the effectiveness or helpfulness of the therapist's input /intervention
- Less for review of their involvement, participation, interaction and dynamics among themselves

2. Critical therapeutic parameters

Common to various forms of psychological interventions;

1. Experience by oneself *e.g. insight, catharsis*
2. Experience with the therapist *e.g. hope, disclosure*
3. Experience with others *e.g. reality testing, identification*

Factors unique to group:

Those experienced only in the presence of others *e.g. vicarious learning, universality* or engaged with others *e.g. altruism*

The unique factors, particularly meaningful to older adults :
fit the psychosocial needs of their life stage *e.g. help battle loneliness and isolation, find support, orient members to time & place*

The question: Having optimized the participants' experience with others, help them review/evaluate the meaning of that experience for them?

3. Fostering, Highlighting and Reviewing Therapeutic Experience for the Participants

Therapeutic experience:

supportive factors, self-revelation factors, learning from others factors, and psychological work factors

a. Supportive components:

Cohesion/Acceptance

Universality

Altruism

Sense of Hope

Cohesion/Acceptance

individual feelings of belonging, interpersonal friendliness & valuing

3 levels:

- Group level (sense of togetherness in the group)
- Member-to-member (members' levels of attraction for one another)
- Individual-member (individual's level of felt commitment to the group)

Universality

sense of not alone with one's problem(s)

Altruism

opportunities participants have to be helpful to one another

Hope

positing goals, recognizing pathways to reach the goals and regarding the self as capable of sustaining effort

b. Self-revelation:

revealing oneself to the group in a cognitive or affective way that is accompanied by a sense of relief

Self-disclosure:

testing fear of being known, sense of trust in the group

Catharsis:

emotional expression, the relief felt, then needs to be a cognitive framework in which to place experience

c. Learning from Others

Modeling:

copying a particular behaviour or set of behaviours exhibited by another participants

Vicarious Learning:

privately applying knowledge gained from the behaviours of others, or interactions between them, to one's life

Advice/Guidance

d. Psychological work

Interpersonal Learning:

attaining a cognitive and affective awareness of one's interpersonal style and the effects it produces on others

Self-understanding/Insight:

gaining insight into the internal processes that give rise to aspects of one's interpersonal style

Summary

Therapeutic experience for the participants:

- Not equal to techniques and conditions for change
- Refer to a context for +ve change as a result of the participants' response, no matter that perception is based on a feeling, insight, new behaviours or the behaviours of someone else in the group

To evaluate the impact of groups on their participants, can't miss this aspect

- Ask participants to articulate the most important/critical event of the session/in the group
- Help them know what experience may be mediating their change

References

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