CHAPTER **1**

INTRODUCTION TO GROUP WORK

My wife, a retired social work administrator, is offering training work-shops to Boards of Directors of non-profit agencies . . . she sure puts group dynamics to work . . . My son-in-law directs the Emergency Room at a large local hospital. He sure puts group dynamics to work. Harold Kelman has been applying group dynamics to the tinder-box of the Middle East . . .

—Morris Goodman (1995, p. 2)

And so it goes.

—Linda Ellerbee (1986)

INTRODUCTION: WELCOME, ⬤ BOOK FRAMEWORK, AND STRUCTURE

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this book on group work and its leadership. I hope you will find its contents to be inviting and informative.

I'm excited to present this information to you because group work is such an important method for counselors and other helpers to include in their helping repertoire. As Goodman, a past president of the Society of Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy, implies in his earlier quote above, group dynamics—a key part of group work—are used in a variety of ways, in a range of settings, and for a number of reasons. Those of us in the helping professions— counselors, psychologists, social workers, human service providers, human relations consultants and coaches, and more—most often think of group work in terms of group counseling and group psychotherapy, no

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doubt. Fair enough, they are essential forms. But, as you will come to see, group work also is employed in organization change, discussion groups, teaching skills, community development, management, and in many other ways. It is used to heal, to promote, to facilitate, and to change; it is applied in schools, clinics, the workplace, and communities. *And so it goes.* Indeed, group work truly is a robust method that applies group dynamics in a variety of ways, and it takes a broad umbrella to span it. We will talk more on this topic later in the chapter.

This book is developed to advance the evolving group work competencies of students and trainees and to provide instructional opportunities for faculty to incorporate within and outside of class. Text materials will inform you about the theory and practice of group work, which is a comprehensive and unique service. More than 100 case illustrations, figures, and learning exercises are provided and are geared to promote group work leadership skills within counseling and all helping professions.

Although we will give closest attention to the products and services of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and its "group" division, the Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW), each helping profession has its own professional association, supportive academic disciplines, and professional literature (Figure 2–1 in Chapter 2 contains basic contact information). For instance, the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups (AASWG) has produced its own training document, *Standards for Social Work Practice with Groups* (2010), and the American Group Psychotherapy Association has developed its *Practice Guidelines for Group Psychotherapy* (2007). The Society for Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy, as many of these associations, has its own unique journal—*Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice.* Clearly, group work as a practice results from the contributions of many professions and influencing academic disciplines, such as psychology, counseling, education, social work, management, sociology, and social psychology.

Chapters in this book draw from many of these sources. They are intended to help enhance group work training and practice in such a way as to foster your ongoing development as a competent helping professional, regardless of your professional affiliation.

In general, all chapters in this text are developed to

a. blend contemporary theory with current research and empirical support;

b. help you translate theory and research discussed into professional decision making and application through inclusion of case illustrations, figures, and learning exercises;

c. foster your professional identity and with it the assimilation of the ethics and standards of practice guiding the helping professions;

d. attend to diversity and multicultural influences; and

e. illustrate the comprehensiveness and uniqueness of group work as a service delivery method for counselors and other professional helpers.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

As a result of reading this chapter you will be able to

- Show how group work is a broad helping methodology
- Show that groups are commonplace in our lives
- Discuss five perspectives supporting group work
- Explain how all groups are interpersonal phenomena
- Indicate that research on group work (especially group counseling and psychotherapy) generally attests to its effectiveness
- Describe various conceptualizations of working with groups
- Understand the framework used by the ASGW as a general model that can be applied to other situations
- Present that group work can be thought of as an umbrella term, spanning core group work competencies and four types/specializations of group work
- Define group work and its major components
- Define the four types of group work, as defined by the ASGW: task, psycho-education, counseling, and psychotherapy

Let's move ahead now by considering the umbrella of services that characterizes group work.

GROUPS ARE EVERYWHERE ●

To understand group work, one must first understand groups themselves, their basic nature and the processes that characterize them (Forsyth, 2011). Humans generally enjoy being around others and choose to engage together for any number of outlets.

Note the following: "People, no matter what they are doing—working, relaxing, studying, exercising, worshiping, playing, socializing, watching entertainment, or sleeping—are usually in a group rather than alone" (Forsyth, 2011, p. 19).

Groups, then, are ubiquitous in our society and around the world, both in daily living and, increasingly, as an intentional method to induce

growth and development and/or the alleviation and resolution of life problems.

Case Illustration 1–1 and Learning Exercise 1–1 are intended to sensitize you to the presence of groups in your life.

Case Illustration 1–1: A Day in the Life

*The **object** of this case illustration is to demonstrate how being connected with others occurs on a daily basis for many people. This daily interaction with others suggests that working with people in groups is a natural approach.*

Antwan is a sophomore at State U. In his Introduction to Sociology course, the professor has assigned each student the task of observing their daily activities over the course of one week. Here is a sample of some of Antwan's activities for the preceding week:

- Friday night, socialized and went drinking with four friends

- Saturday afternoon, went to basketball game with my roommate

- Saturday night, went to dinner with my girlfriend and another couple

- Sunday, slept in until noon; hung out with friends later

- Monday–Thursday, went to class every day

- Tuesday night, studied with my study group

- Wednesday night, worked on group project for Careers class

Returning to the first question, how Antwan spent his time, among other things, it seems apparent from Antwan's report that many of his activities involved him with other people. This situation is not unusual but, rather, is consistent with what we know of how most people live their daily lives—they are involved with others, whether by choice (e.g., going to a basketball game with a roommate) or by circumstance (e.g., participating in assigned group projects). Such ongoing daily interaction with others represents a support for working with people in groups.

Learning Exercise 1–1: Take a Life Sample

*The **object** of this learning exercise is to help readers examine how they spend their own daily lives and what this might possibly imply for group work.*

Now, take a sample of your world during a typical week. What did you do during that weekend? During the weekdays, Monday–Friday?

1. List five activities with which you were involved, as Antwan did in the previous case illustration:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Record the number of activities in which you were involved with others: _____

3. Hypothesize how your general involvement with others might relate to your working style in groups.

WHAT IS GROUP WORK? ●

Five Perspectives Underlying Group Work

Five major perspectives undergird group work:

a. *Individual* perspective, having its basic origins and primary focus on the individual person

b. *Group* perspective, focused on the group unit itself as the main point of reference, the group

c. *Interpersonal* perspective, where member interaction and the relationships among participants is key

d. *Contextual* perspective, which takes the interactions of people with each other *and* with the group environment as central

e. *Multicultural-diversity* perspective, which posits that all group work is multicultural

Note that these five perspectives are not mutually exclusive. In the real world, there is overlap among them.

The individual person perspective. The individual perspective occupies a hallowed position in Western culture (e.g., humanistic philosophers, such as John Locke), American history (notably, the Declaration of Independence), and in the counseling profession as well. According to Kitchener (1984), there is the principle of autonomy as a core moral value guiding ethical practice. Certainly, a "group" would not exist without individuals, and the growth, development, and welfare of individuals is essential in all of forms of counseling practice, including group work.

The group perspective. However, it needs to be stressed that a *group* is more than a number of separate individuals occupying the same space at the same time. As you have seen from reading the preface, when people gather in a group and begin to interact, a number of dynamics and processes are generated. In fact, a group is an excellent example of an organism being more than the sum of its individual parts because of the multiplicative impacts that result from member-to-member interactions. In a group, $1 + 1 + 1$ does not equal 3, but some other integer greater than 3. Another way to think of this multiplicative factor is in relation to the number of paired interactions possible in a group, which greatly exceeds the obvious. For instance, in a group of eight members, if you'd think that four possible member pairings exist (as many might, at least at first glance), you would be wrong; in this case, the number of possible paired interactions is 28. (For those of you interested in the math, the calculation of number of pairings is $n(n - 1)/2$ or, in this instance, $8(7)/2 = 56/2 = 28$ pairs. Of course, additional combinations occur in groups beyond pairing, such as when a subgroup of three of more people interacts. Although a group is comprised of individual members, once they begin communicating, more complicated and powerful dynamics are generated.

The interpersonal perspective. Participating in a group is above all an interpersonal experience. By definition, a group is not a group without individual members being in relation to each other. So, an interpersonal perspective is tied to ongoing interactions and the relationships that develop over time among group participants. The quality of these relationships—their positive or negative valence, their degree of intimacy or distance, their level of safety or danger, their activity or passivity—strongly influences

whether the group will coalesce and its members will enjoy a meaningful and productive experience.

The contextual perspective. This perspective is based on the assumptions that people do not exist in a vacuum but they are embedded within environments and that people and environments are mutually influencing. Thus, to understand persons, it is necessary to understand them within their milieu, their context. George Stern (1970), a pioneering ecological researcher, referred to this condition as the congruence of "people in context." Fritjof Capra (1996), an innovator in understanding living systems, captured the interaction between people and environments as the "web of life."

The group offers a prime example of people in context. In a group, individual participants, their relationships, and their connection within the total group all are in context and subject to a dynamic and reciprocal influencing process. For instance, how a person feels about being a group member is a function not only of his or her personal characteristics, but also is influenced by such variables as the kinds of relationships that exist with other members, and the climate of the group. Lewin (1936) represented this situation as $B = f(PxE)$, or Behavior is a function of Persons interacting with levels of their Environment.

The multicultural-diversity perspective. This perspective is based on the assumption that all groups are microcosms of the community and the world. That is, each member brings to the group a unique set of demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic condition, educational level, relationship status, religious/spiritual beliefs), cultural background (e.g., ethnicity, race, worldview), lifestyle (e.g., sexual orientation, family life), awareness of identities (of self, others, self in relation to others), status similarities and differences (e.g., rank, power, and influence), experience (e.g., work, travel, involvements with others), and derived meaning (beliefs, values, assumptions) that mirror the world from which they come (Anderson, 2007). This world is both multicultural and diverse (DeLucia-Waack & Donigian, 2004; Salazar, 2009). In turn, multiculturalism and diversity are inherent in all of group work (DeLucia-Waack, 2006b).

When members interact with one another in the group, then, a major part of what is happening is an exercise in diversity, which can yield both positive and negative consequences. That is, it can yield an environment teeming with abundance through which members can learn remarkable things about themselves and others. Or, it can produce an environment fraught with defensiveness and fear, where members learn or reiterate distrust others who are unlike themselves.

It is an ethical responsibility of group work leaders to acquire the awareness, knowledge, and competencies allowing for effective functioning in the diverse and multicultural context of the group.

Group Work Is an Umbrella Term

Like an umbrella that spans and covers space, group work is an expansive term covering a comprehensive set of group mediated methods, which I mentioned at the start of this chapter. These methods, sometimes referred to as types or specializations (Note: I use these terms interchangeably), are intentionally used to help people cope and be more effective in their personal lives, in their involvements with others, and in the tasks they perform with others in organized settings. Working with people in groups provides an important way for counselors to reduce dysfunction, develop competencies, promote prevention of future life problems, and collaborate with others in solving problems and achieving task goals. Group methods provide a viable alternative—a unique way—to other counseling approaches, such as individual counseling and consultation, and often complement them in practice (Bemak & Conyne, 2004).

Various Conceptualizations of Group Methods

Group methods have been conceptualized in different ways (Conyne, 2011, 2012). For instance, the Society for Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy (Division 49 of the American Psychological Association) organizes the range of group methods under "group psychology and group psychotherapy." The American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA) uses *group psychotherapy* as the overarching term covering, as Yalom and Leszcz (2005) put it in the preface to their classic text, *group therapies*, rather than *group therapy* (p. xii). The Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups (AASWG) uses the term common in social work, *group work*, as the organizing construct. The Association for Specialists in Group Work (ASGW of the American Counseling Association) also employs the broad term, group work, to contain a range of group methods.

Group Work Is Effective

Are group work approaches effective? The overwhelming research indicates they are. Group counseling, psychotherapy, and psychoeducation are the forms of group work receiving the most research attention (e.g., Barlow, Fuhriman, & Burlingame, 2004; Conyne, 2011, 2012; Leszcz & Kobos, 2008). Empirical research is accumulating to indicate that they are at the minimum as effective as individual therapy in producing client change. As

well, research in the area of task groups, especially those that are based on teams that use interactive processes, has been shown to be effective in many circumstances (e.g., Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Hackman, 2002; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). Moreover, all group work affords many additional benefits, including those of efficiencies and cost benefits (e.g., Bauman, 2009; Spitz, 1996), belonging, social support, and other advantages that can result from positive interactions with others (Forsyth, 2010).After reviewing hundreds of studies, Barlow, Burlingame, and Fuhriman (2000) concluded that "the group format consistently produced positive effects with a number of disorders using a variety of treatment models" (p. 122).

The mounting evidence supporting the effectiveness of group approaches, however, does not mean that all questions have been answered. Although variables such as cohesion (i.e., the sense that group participants matter to one another) clearly contribute to overall effectiveness, the mechanisms for change are not so clear in any type of group work. "There remains a critical need for empirically supported group processes and conditions, for development of more measures to accurately detect them, and for the actionable group leadership that is tied to these group processes and conditions" (Conyne, 2011, p. 612). For those of you who may find research of high interest, take note. The field of group work needs not only good practitioners but also good researchers. A lot has been accomplished and there is so much more to do.

ASGW'S CONCEPTION OF GROUP WORK ●

Core Group Work Competencies

In the ASGW framework, a set of *core competencies* (attitudes, knowledge, and skills) is held out as the supportive platform of all group work. Examples of these core competencies, drawn from the *ASGW Professional Standards for the Training of Group Workers* (ASGW, 2000) include encouraging participation of group members, knowing therapeutic factors, and demonstrating collaborative consultation with targeted populations to enhance the ecological validity of planned group interventions—among many others.

Group work core competencies undergird what all counselors who lead groups should be able to do at the minimum (ASGW, 2000).They are conceptualized as Knowledge and Skills and are arranged into seven categories:

a. Nature and scope of practice

b. Assessment of group members and social systems in which they live and work

c. Planning group interventions

d. Implementation of group interventions

e. Leadership and coleadership

f. Evaluation

g. Ethical practice, best practice, diversity-competent practice

Learning Exercise 1–2 gives you the opportunity to examine a few of your core competencies.

Learning Exercise 1–2: Assessing Some of Your Core Competencies

*The **object** of this learning exercise is to help you identify strengths and areas for improvement in group work core competencies.*

The following checklist contains a sample of core competency items, one from knowledge and another from skills within each of the seven categories. Use the "OK" and "Needs Improvement" columns to indicate present status:

	OK	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
1. Nature and scope of practice		
Knowledge: Nature of group work and its various specializations	_____	_____
Skill: Preparing a professional disclosure statement for practice	_____	_____
2. Assessment of group members and social systems		
Knowledge: Principles of assessment of group functioning in group work	_____	_____
Skill: Observing personal characteristics of individual members in a group	_____	_____

(Continued)

3. Planning group interventions

   Knowledge: Principles of planning for _____ _____
   group *work*

   Skill: Planning for group work activity _____ _____
   (*e.g.*, purpose, methods)

4. Implementation of group interventions

   Knowledge: Therapeutic factors in _____ _____
   group work and when group approaches
   are indicated and counterindicated

   Skill: Giving and receiving feedback in _____ _____
   a group setting

5. Leadership and coleadership

   Knowledge: Group leadership styles and _____ _____
   approaches

   Skill: Engaging in collaborative group _____ _____
   processing

6. Evaluation

   Knowledge: Methods for evaluating _____ _____
   group process in group work

   Skill: Contributing to evaluation _____ _____
   activities during group participation

7. Ethical practice, best practice, diversity-
   competent practice

   Knowledge: Best practices in group work _____ _____

   Skill: Evidencing ethical practice in,
   planning observing, and participating in
   group activities

   Skill: Demonstrating awareness of _____ _____
   other cultures

   SUM UP: Review your responses and write a summary paragraph
about the present status of your core competencies.

Four Advanced Types of Group Work

Resting on and extending these core group work competencies are four advanced types, methods, or specializations of group work (ASGW, 2000; Conyne, Wilson, & Ward, 1997). All of these forms of group work also make full use of group processes, dynamics, and therapeutic conditions. These advanced types of group work are the following:

(a) *Task/work groups,* which facilitate accomplishing specific project-oriented goals (Arrow, McGrath, & Berdahl, 2000; Conyne, 1989; Conyne, Rapin, & Rand, 1997; Fatout & Rose, 1995; Forsyth, 2009; Hackman, 2002; Hulse-Killacky, Killacky, & Donigian, 2001; Kormanski, 1999, 2001; Reddy, 1994; Schwarz, 2002; Wheelan, 2004). Schwarz's (2002) description of a work group fits well: "a set of people with specific interdependent roles who are collectively responsible for producing some output (service, product, or decision) that can be assessed, and who manage their relationships with those outside the group" (2002, p. 20). Note the emphasis on interdependent functioning, output production, the types of output, and connections with the external environment (Larson & LaFasto, 1989; Sundstrom, DeMeuse, & Futrell, 1990). The primary focus in task groups is on the work, but attention also must be paid to human interactions that support or detract from work accomplishment. An example can be found in a classroom discussion group, where the main purpose is to learn content through the process of group members interacting with one another (see Hill, 1969). In the work setting, task groups often are referred to as work groups or teams that can be used for a range of purposes: planning, decision making, setting policy, and a number of other activities aimed at reaching organizational goals (Wheelan, 2004). Problem-solving processes are prime elements of a task or work group (Conyne, Rapin, et al., 1997).

(b) *Psychoeducation groups,* which teach life competencies through education and skill training (Brown, 1998, 2005; DeLucia-Waack, 2006a; Furr, 2000; Rivera et al., 2004). Psychoeducation groups use planned, structured activities with the group leader functioning as a facilitator, teacher, and trainer. Didactic presentation, skill demonstration and practice, and use of group process are interwoven throughout group sessions. The overall focus of a psychoeducation group is on development and prevention.

(c) *Group counseling,* which resolves typical stressful problems of daily living (Conyne, 2011, 2012; Corey, 2012; Delucia-Waack, Gerrity, Kalodner, & Riva, 2004; Gladding, 2011b; Kline, 2003; Posthuma, 2002; Trotzer, 2006). While these issues present challenges, they generally tend not to impede daily functioning. In addition to helping members work through designated life problems, such as loneliness or mild anxiety, group counseling also can promote interpersonal growth and development. While group

counseling is useful primarily for people who may be experiencing transitory maladjustment, it "occupies a broad middle section of the helping goals continuum where prevention, development, and remediation all play important roles, depending on member needs and situational supports and constraints" (Conyne, 2012, p. 615).

(d) *Group psychotherapy,* which remediates psychological and emotional dysfunction (Agazarian, 2004; AGPA, 2007, 2012, n.d.; Bernard & McKenzie, 1994; Delucia-Waack et al., 2004; Leszcz & Kobos, 2008; Weinberg, 2012; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). It addresses maladaptive conditions of group members, those that serve to interfere with their daily functioning. It may involve attending to both historical, past behavior as well as to present circumstances in efforts to help correct distortions and repetitive patterns of dysfunctional behavior and to promote healthier personal and interpersonal attitudes, feelings, and behavior.

Case Illustration 1–2 announces the four types of group work through a university counseling center flyer.

Case Illustration 1–2: Four Types of Group Work

*The **object** of this case illustration is to further acquaint you with definitions of group work types.*

Groups at the Counseling Center Flyer

Groups are a great way for people to learn, to improve, and even to change in needed directions.

We invite participation in the groups we are offering this semester. All of them provide opportunities for connecting with others to reach goals. Below are brief descriptions. To indicate your interest in participating, or just to ask questions about any of the groups, call XXX-YYYY or just stop by. The groups are

Task Groups: Solving Real World Tasks and Problems. These groups are intended for organizations on campus, whether they are for students or for faculty and staff. The groups are arranged to fit circumstances and can assist with clarifying organizational goals, helping the organization to reduce conflict and improve cooperative functioning, or facilitating planning and evaluation.

Psychoeducation Groups: Building Life Skills. These groups help members enhance their knowledge and skills in everyday and necessary

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skills for living, such as maintaining relationships and coping with academic stressors. They use some structured exercises and practice, along with open discussion, to help members deal even more successfully with college life.

Group Counseling: Resolving Problems of Living. Everyone is challenged by life's demands. On a residential college campus such as ours, some of these life challenges may include loneliness, roommate conflicts, managing newfound "freedom," finding ways to cope satisfactorily with academic pressures, developing and maintaining relationships, and many more. Group counseling builds interpersonal connections and support among members to learn effective methods for better handling life's never-ending challenges.

Group Psychotherapy: Correcting Deeper Personal Problems. Sometimes the challenges of college life can become excessive, outstripping a student's available resources to handle them well or with ease. This situation can lead to feeling out of control, and possibly to feelings of depression and low self-worth. When this happens, it often is harder to study and to be with other people. Group psychotherapy is available to help qualifying students develop the deeper level of support they need to develop corrective strategies that can get them back on a positive track.

Figure 1–1 depicts the relationship between the core group work standards and the four group work types (Conyne-Rapin, 1996).

Figure 1.1   The Group Work Rainbow

Source: From Conyne-Rapin, Z., 2006. Used with permission.

In this book, which is part of a series of books concerned with both the helping professions and, more particularly, with counseling as a profession, we will pay close attention to materials published by ASGW. Founded in 1973, the Association for Specialists in Group Work is a division of the American Counseling Association. According to its website, ASGW is comprised of counseling professionals who are interested in and specialize in group work. They value creation of community and service to their members, their clients, and their profession. They likewise value leadership as a process to facilitate the growth and development of individuals and groups (www.asgw.org).

ASGW GROUP WORK DEFINITION ●

As defined by ASGW, group work is a broad term encompassing a range of group methods, known singularly as task groups, psychoeducation groups, group counseling, and group psychotherapy. By extension, group work also embraces related group applications, such as support groups, prevention groups, and self-directed groups, among others.

By definition,

Group work is a broad professional practice that refers to the giving of help or the accomplishment of tasks in a group setting. It involves the application of group theory and process by a capable professional practitioner to assist an interdependent collection of people to reach their mutual goals, which may be personal, interpersonal, or task-related in nature. (ASGW, 2000, p. 3; Conyne, Wilson, & Ward, 1997, p. 14)

Let's break this definition into its seven parts (Conyne, Wilson, et al., 1997).

Group Work Definition, Part I:
Group Work Is a Broad Professional Practice

Group work is a professional practice just as is individual counseling, consultation, or family counseling (Conyne & Bemak, 2004a, 2004b). Associated with it are sets of knowledge and skills, training standards, best-practice guidelines, diversity principles, theory, and research.

Group work emerges from no single academic discipline, profession, or association. Rather, it is a broad professional practice that has been influenced

by divergent sources including, but not limited to (a) *academic disciplines* of sociology, psychology, and political science; (b) *professions* of counseling, clinical psychology, counseling psychology, social work, community psychology, organization development, social psychology, public health, and teacher education; and (c) *professional organizations* such as the National Training Laboratories, Esalen, American Association of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama, American Group Psychotherapy Association, Association for Specialists in Group Work, the Society for Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy; and (d) the *research and publications* of numerous scholars across many fields over the last 110 years (Barlow, Fuhriman, & Burlingame, 2004; Conyne, 2011; Leddick, 2011).

Group Work Definition, Part II:
Giving Help or Accomplishing Tasks in a Group Setting

Group work is a method with two central concentrations, to (a) provide help to group members who seek resolution, change, or growth in relation to personal and interpersonal domains, and (b) assist group members to achieve tasks and goals and to produce desired products and outcomes.

Personal and interpersonal concentration. Group work leaders collaborate with members to establish a positive therapeutic climate in the group. Such a climate, which is both safe and challenging, allows the leader opportunities for encouraging members to join together cohesively to help each other to improve or to change aspects of their lives (Corey, 2012; Gladding, 2011b; Marmarosh & Van Horn, 2011; Trotzer, 2006).

Task concentration. In task groups, such as committees and staff meetings, leaders place priority on helping group members join together to accomplish tasks and produce concrete products. Examples include strategic plans, position papers, organization development activities, training and staff development, prevention program plans, team teaching, focus groups, and program evaluations (Conyne, 1989; Conyne, Rapin, et al., 1997; Hulse-Killacky, 1996; Hulse-Killacky, Killacky, & Donigian, 2001; Johnson & Johnson, 2008).

Group Work Definition, Part III:
Involving the Application of Group Theory and Process

Group work grew out of individual counseling and continues to be strongly influenced by it. For example, most textbooks in group counseling or group psychotherapy (e.g., Corey, 2009; Gladding, 2011b; Yalom

& Leszcz, 2005) prominently feature content addressing theories of counseling. Generally, these are theories of individual counseling, the helping mode that has typified the profession and the practice of counseling. Yet it is the case that group work emerges not from the individual frame of reference but from an interpersonal and group perspective, as I noted earlier.

Individual counseling quickly assumed the dominant helping method in the United States because it best matches the individualistic and independent Western European ethos that has historically characterized American culture. Arguably, it also is less complex and complicated to understand and deliver than other counseling interventions that involve larger numbers of people and may be embedded within bigger systems, such as group work, family counseling, and consultation. So, individual counseling was a natural first choice for counseling.

However, our culture is broadening to include people from other races, ethnicities, and places of birth. For instance, U.S. census bureau statistics reveal that one-third of the population identified as part of a racial or ethnic minority group (e.g., Latino([a])/Hispanic, African American, Asian), including 45% of children under age 5 (Population Reference Group, 2012). In such minority populations, a group, family, and more collectivist orientation tends to be characteristic. As our society grows ever more multicultural and diverse, accompanied by a collectivist, group-centered conception of life (Herr, 2004), group and other interpersonal modes of counseling will continue to gain attention and use.

Likewise, the reliance upon individual counseling is now expanding to embrace group and family approaches more fully, in part due to the need to mirror the variety of populations seeking counseling assistance (Bemak & Conyne, 2004; Conyne, 2003; Conyne & Bemak, 2004a, 2004b) and to increase the cultural appropriateness of counseling. In turn, a more authentic counseling that matches the worldview and values of clients and group members is ethically right and is a best practice.

While group work is its own professional practice, what needs to be more fully developed is a theoretical base that is unique from theories of individual counseling. As has been suggested (e.g., Conyne, 2003) this theoretical foundation "will emerge from an interdependent and collectivistic orientation, giving close attention to contextual circumstances" (p. 294). Bemak and Conyne (2004) have expanded upon this point to recommend an interdependent, ecological theoretical framework to support group work. This framework emphasizes the connections among group members and between the group and its external environment (Conyne & Cook, 2004). Therefore, it is very different from an individualistic orientation, which is much more sensitive to individual counseling. Instead, it would support

how people in a group interact and connect with one another, which is the essence of group work. Note that Chapter 6 is devoted to the topic of theories in group work.

See Case Illustration 1–3 and Learning Exercise 1–3 to explore the place of interpersonal connections in your life.

Case Illustration 1–3: People Are Connected

*The **object** of this case illustration is to underline the importance of social support.*

Sylvia worried about her sister, Carmelita. Where was she? She was supposed to have come home by 6:00 p.m. Already an hour late. She called her mother, her brother; no answers there. She thought about Sylvia's many friends, some of them whom she knew. She called Julio, but no answer. She tried Frieda and was answered by a message system. What should she do?

In the end, after another half hour, it turned out that Carmelita was simply delayed by "good times." She came home, albeit late.

Looking back at it, Sylvia thought, what a wonderful network of supportive people Carmelita has in her life. Maybe, she thought, I should not worry so much.

Learning Exercise 1–3: What About Your Social Support Network?

*The **object** of this learning exercise is to provide you with a way to take a look at your own social support network and to estimate its meaning for group work.*

Sometimes a social network is more important than at other times. Sylvia's situation was one of those times. But at nearly any time connections with friends and family can be important, not only for pleasure but also for the support and sustenance they can provide. This condition also is very important in a group. How connected are you with other members? How supported do you feel? How much assistance are you able to provide to others?

(Continued)

Consider your social connections. How are you with other people? Think about the following three questions, rate your responses, and be prepared to discuss with others (Circle the appropriate response, where "1" = Not at all, and "5" = Totally.)

1. I am connected with other people in my life. 1 2 3 4 5

2. If I needed help, I could turn to others. 1 2 3 4 5

3. I see myself as being available to help others. 1 2 3 4 5

Reflect on your responses to these three questions. What is the meaning? What implications might there be for group work?

Group Work Definition, Part IV: By a Capable Professional Practitioner

Effective group work leadership doesn't just happen, although some people may be more naturally adept at it than others. In the main, though, group leaders are trained, not born (Barlow, 2004; Bennis & Nanus, 1997; Kottler, 1981).

How to prepare effective group work leaders has been the subject of considerable study, trials, guidance, and research over the decades. Examples include the professional training standards of ASGW (1983, 1991, 2000), special issues of the *Journal for Specialists in Group Work* (1981, 1996, 2004) devoted to group leader preparation and training, and a treasure trove of other scholarly products, such as summaries of effective group leadership (Riva, Wachtel, & Lasky, 2004; Stockton, Morran, & Krieger, 2004) and group leadership teaching and training (Brown, 2011).

Presented in the following are what a capable group work practitioner generally needs to be able to do and how these assets can be developed:

a. Possess a positive attitude and be personally and interpersonally at ease and effective, achievable through a combination of natural characteristics and nurturing training

b. Demonstrate attitudes, knowledge, skills, techniques, and best practices required for leading groups, achievable through a comprehensive training program

c. Apply learning effectively and appropriately, achievable through guided practice in both simulated and real situations

d. Continuously improve their group leadership abilities and skills, achievable through ongoing processing and supervision

Four tested strategies for teaching students about group work leadership are presented in Case Illustration 1–4, and following you can identify which strategies so far seem to be a part of your group work learning.

Case Illustration 1–4: Four Tried and True Learning Strategies

The **object** of this case illustration is for you to understand four proven ways to learn about group work and associated leader skills.

Barlow (2004) outlined four "tried and true learning strategies" (p. 115) for teaching group leaders the skills they need to be effective. These four strategies enjoy considerable empirical support and include the following:

a. Experiential learning strategy. Students need to learn what it is like to be in a group. This experience gives them a reality base to draw from and helps them to empathize with the experience of the group members who will be in their own groups. Many programs include it.

b. Observation learning strategy. Watching experts in live or taped demonstrations of group leadership can reveal a lot about group work leadership in a relatively low threat manner. Intentionally teaching group process observation skills, such as who seems to open doors for others to enter conversations and who seems to close them, in combination with viewing a group can sharpen knowledge and skills.

c. Academic learning strategy. The amount of content material that needs to be mastered by those in training to be group practitioners is "daunting" (Barlow, 2004, p. 120), ranging across theory, practice, and research in groups and in various applications of groups with differing populations. While the domains of education and training in content and skills have been identified yet still await empirical support according to Brown (2011), the "current state of only one course to teach all of the dimensions of groups and group leadership does not meet the entry level needs for knowledge and skill as group leaders (Brown, 2011, p. 366). Academic programs that prepare students to become practitioners, such as those in social work, counseling, or psychology,

(Continued)

are guided by training standards. In the counseling profession, for instance, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs accreditation standards for group work, coupled with the professional training standards and best practice guidelines of ASGW, lay out a basic blueprint of what is needed, as Chapter 2 of this book will show. Evidence-based research is needed about how to best deliver this training.

d. Supervision learning strategy. Group leaders in training must receive adequate supervision in order to develop their competency. Supervision is the learning strategy that can best yield an integration of theory, research, and practice into one's own evolving personal and professional application. As pointed out by Riva (2011), the supervisor needs to be competent in two essential areas: (a) supervision methods and (b) the complexities of group applications. The supervision of group work leadership is a critically important part of how novice leaders advance toward expert stage.

Learning Exercise 1–4: Assessing How You Are Learning About Group Work

*The **object** of this learning exercise is to provide you with a means for assessing how you are learning about group work.*

I wonder how you and fellow students are being taught group work leadership? Or, if you are a graduate of a professional helping program in counseling, psychology, or social work, how were you taught about it?

1. Turn your attention to that question of how you are (or were) being educated and trained in group work leadership.

2. Use the scale attached to each strategy below to judge the presence or lack of it in your own training and then provide any relevant comments.

   a. *Experiential* learning strategy (e.g., participation in a group): Extent to which your group work leadership learning springs from this strategy ("1" = Not at all through "5" = Very much):

   1   2   3   4   5

   Comments:

(Continued)

(Continued)

    b. *Observation* learning strategy (e.g., observing a group in action):
       Extent to which your group work leadership learning springs from this strategy ("1" = Not at all through "5" = Very much):
       1   2   3   4   5
       Comments:

    c. *Academic* learning strategy (e.g., from an academic course dedicated to group work):
       Extent to which your group work leadership learning springs from this strategy ("1" = Not at all through "5" = Very much):
       1   2   3   4   5
       Comments:

    d. *Supervision* learning strategy (i.e., your group work leadership being supervised):
       Extent to which your group work leadership learning springs from this strategy ("1" = Not at all through "5" = Very much):
       1   2   3   4   5
       Comments:

Group Work Definition, Part V: To Assist an Interdependent Collection of People

One of the most important aspects involved with becoming a capable group work leader is developing conditions in the group that allow members to interact directly with each other (Stockton et al., 2004). In some ways, this requires that group leaders learn how to "let go" of ideas that leaders take charge or dominate proceedings, in favor of adopting an approach to nurture the creation of therapeutic factors (e.g., instilling hope, promoting cohesion), which, in turn, sets the stage for member-to-member connections. Likewise, group leaders in training may need to unlearn some other conceptions, such as group leadership is the performance of individual therapy within the group (Barlow, 2004). While sometimes engaging in one-to-one intervention with a group member is called for by the group leader, this "telephone switchboard" model of group leadership—where everything goes through the leader—is not recommended for general practice. Rather, a "network" model is where the group leader seeks to foster interconnections of members with each other, freeing them to interact directly.

Group Work Definition, Part VI: To Reach Mutual Goals

Goals are motivating. Setting goals in a group can help direct and maintain action in a cohesive way and then provide a yardstick for measuring if the effort expended led to desired results.

In group work, there usually are general goals for the group itself and more specific ones for each of the members. In both cases, these goals can be process- and outcome-oriented. By *process-oriented*, I mean goals that are centered on the ongoing activities of the group; by *outcome-oriented*, I mean goals that focus on what will be accomplished by the group's end point.

An example of a *process-oriented group* goal might be "to allow members opportunities to interact with each other during each session." An example of an *outcome-oriented group* goal might be "to assist members in reaching their stated goals by the end of the group." As I mentioned, individual members are encouraged to establish their own goals within the larger goals of the group. An example of a *process-oriented individual member* goal might be "to listen carefully to what other members say during sessions," while an example of *an outcome-oriented individual member* goal might be "to increase my ability to be supportive to my wife by the group's end."

An important aspect of goal setting in group work is that the goals be collaboratively designed and mutually reinforcing. In terms of individual member goals, the group leader's role is to encourage their creation by each member and then to ensure with the members that these goals are generally consistent with the overarching group purpose and its goals. This is what I mean by *collaborative and mutually reinforcing*—that is, the group work leader and members cooperate to set goals that are meaningful to members and that are reachable within the context of the group itself. The quality of this process of goal setting, which occurs early in the group's development, can contribute substantially to the emerging group climate and to the eventual success of the group experience for everyone.

Group Work Definition, Part VII: Goals May Be Personal, Interpersonal, or Task Related

Group work is a robust method that majors in multiplicity. It spans four types of groups. It is influenced by numerous academic disciplines and professions. And its goals may be personal and interpersonal—especially interpersonal—or task related.

Personal goals. Personal change and growth, emerging from targeting personal goals, are the sine qua non of counseling. Examples of personal goals include becoming more appropriately self-disclosive, losing 10 pounds of weight, developing improved communication skills, and resolving feelings of sadness.

As I've pointed out earlier, this attention to individual personal goals in the United States emerges from our earliest heritage in Western Europe. The individual level of intervention so dominates the counseling profession that the term *counseling* still is nearly synonymous with individual counseling. In fact, try this yourself. When you consider what counseling is, what first comes to mind? Chances are, it's one-on-one counseling. But as Morrill, Oetting, and Hurst (1974) showed the profession decades ago, counseling is not limited to an individual intervention level. It also includes group, organizational, and community levels.

Interpersonal goals. Group work is naturally conversant with interpersonal (and ecological) models. Examples of interpersonal goals in a group include learning how to relate better with others, developing skills to effectively support others and becoming more adept at providing and receiving constructive feedback. Because group work is an interdependent process, one of a group work leader's chief responsibilities is to help foster an interpersonal, interconnected network among group members. This is what spawns member interaction that, in turn, is what leads to change and growth in members.

Task and maintenance/personal relations functions in groups. Task and maintenance/personal relations functions are a part of any group, to be sure. The classic work, *Interaction Process Analysis* (Bales, 1950), and an updated version, *Systematic Multiple Level Observation of Groups (SYMLOG)* (e.g., Bales, 1999), catalogued how group members function in groups according to task and to socioemotive (maintenance) functions. Think of your experience in any group—a counseling group, some committee you've served on, even a family gathering. As you reflect, you may quite easily be able to identify that some people in the group may have pushed for some things to be done (task function example), while others may have been more inclined to listen to others and provide encouragement (maintenance/personal relations function examples).

Task functions, such as giving suggestions, serve to propel a group forward, while maintenance/personal relations functions, such as providing support, aid in honoring personal relations by helping members feel encouraged and respected.

Task group goals. Beyond task and maintenance/personal relations functions occurring within any group, the goals of some groups center primarily

around improving personal relations (e.g., therapy groups) while goals of other groups are primarily to problem solve or to produce tangible output (task groups). Examples of task groups include neighborhood councils developing watch groups, study groups to help students master subject material, task forces, and commissions aiming to produce policies. Even in these task groups, where members sometimes may be consumed by achieving concrete goals, maintenance/personal relations issues are involved: members may feel elated or rejected, there may be restless vying for control, sluggish wallowing in confusion, or the exhilaration that can accompany a smoothly running and effective group. Group work principles apply just as well to task groups as they do to personal and interpersonal ones (Conyne, 1989). Group workers can be very helpful in task group facilitating, just as they can with the other more familiar applications, such as group counseling.

GROUP WORK KEYSTONES ●

- Groups are a central part of most people's lives.
- Group work is a comprehensive and unique approach to helping.
- Research generally supports the effectiveness and value of group work and of group counseling and therapy particularly.
- All groups are interpersonally based, and group work leaders rely on both core and advanced competencies.
- Group work as a term can be thought of as an umbrella, spanning core group work competencies and four types/specializations of group work.
- Task groups, psychoeducation groups, group counseling, and group psychotherapy are the four broad specializations of group work endorsed by ASGW, and these can serve as a general model.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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