



THE GROUP THERAPY EXPERIENCE

By Louis Ormont

*Personal lecture notes from Michael Mervosh
For The HJF Apprentice Training Program*

Chapter One – Group Analysis

Group work, when used effectively, is a vehicle for people to identify and deal with their own emotional blocks and limitations.

The successful group member finishes not simply with a superior capacity to relate to others, but also with more inner comfort and with a far better ability to realize his or her own potential.

In short, effective group work should enable people to make inner adjustments, and to use themselves more effectively in the world. *They become better able to love and to work.*

- *People in groups behave in ways that are characteristic of them in their world, and in ways that might not surface in the presence of their individual therapist.*

For example, someone who tends to over-react to the irrationalities of others would have no chance to do this in the presence of their individual therapist, who is ideally rational and relatively neutral.

- *People in groups can feel a curious freedom to express ideas that do not occur to them in their individual work.*

Many people feel inhibited in certain ways in the presence of someone they revere, such as their individual therapist, but will be more willing to cut loose when they find themselves in a room with people they consider their equals or inferiors.

The Subtler Benefits of Group Work

When a person speaks to many others and not just one other individual, his own words echo in his or her mind more loudly. (As the gravity of a personal truth needs a speaker & a listener, this can become more multi-faceted and hold more depth in groups.)

The very fact that many people vie for attention in a group tends to *elicit early childhood feelings of helplessness and competition*, feelings that have influenced a person's life profoundly over the years, and can be resolved within the group.

People whose primary struggles are interpersonal can realize that they can learn to address their needs more directly and effectively while in a group.

For people with interpersonal difficulties, the group serves as a *microcosm of reality* and is the ideal place to solve real problems.

There is no substitute for experiencing one's 'ordinary worst' moments in the learning lab of a group, before approaching them in their daily world.

- *Fundamental to all group therapeutic effort is a single truth – people create their own impasses, and in virtually the same ways.*

People block themselves in their relationships with other group members, just as they block themselves with those in their own lives.

People have ingrained mannerisms by which they handicap themselves, and group work is the arena that evokes these mannerisms and impasses, and helps people to recognize and overcome them.

- *We rest everything on the premise that whatever their problems are in the outside world, they will manifest in the group, and can be resolved right in front of us.*
- *Fundamental to group work is encouraging group members to respond to one another and to talk about their responses, and to discuss how others in the group make them feel.*

We rest everything on the premise that whatever problems are in the outside world, they will be manifested in the group and can be resolved right in front of us.

- *The result is a great new **immediacy**. The group becomes emotionally alive for all the members simultaneously, no matter who is actually speaking to whom.*

To the group facilitator, a real world is given – people who write their own scripts, who create their own inevitabilities. Every member of every group has a story to tell and has not choice *but* to tell that story.

Group work not only gives people unique opportunities for self-expression, it also gives the group therapist an experience not forthcoming in any other way.

A Focusing Reflection Question for Group Work:

What can happen in your particular group setting that could not happen anywhere else in the lives of the particular group members?



Chapter Two – How to Do It Wrong

- *Perhaps half the mistakes that group facilitators make stem from a single misconception – that what works with an individual patient will work with a group.*
- *A common mistake is to conceive of the group not as a unit with an identity and a life of its own, but as a collection of individuals who happen to be in the same room.*

Group work is far more than a simple extension of individual therapy, of being an enlargement of one to many. As group facilitators, we are literally working with the group itself as an entity.

A group facilitator cannot un-attentively permit people to resist closeness and connection with others, without helping them to achieve insight into this resistance.

The group's reactions to any individual who speaks is important, and can be helpful to that person, as well as to others.

- *The group facilitator must always be responsible to those members not talking as well as to those who are.*

What must necessarily seem complex, before one gets accustomed to thinking about the orchestrations of a group as an entity, may become second nature the more one learns to think this way.

- *The primary aim of a group process is to utilize all the members as players.*

Even members not directly involved in an emotional flow become useful as observers.

The group facilitator's task is to deal with the group as a whole, and to bring others into the group interaction when needed, to support the whole.

- *A successful group has a sense of moving forward as a whole.*

When the facilitator includes all of the members all of the time, the group members themselves assist with maintaining the cohesiveness in the group.

Group members will be quick to feel any disturbance to its sense of being intact. They will be alert to stragglers, and to those who are not contributing.

- *Every member becomes an active part of the organism that is a successful group.*



Chapter Three – Involving the Players

The Technique of Bridging

The emotional reactions of group members, one to another, will do more to impede a group than to advance it, unless we get the members to say in no uncertain terms how they feel.

On the other hand, if we find the members having and expressing their reactions to one another, we are tapping a potentially powerful resource for a therapeutic outcome.

- *In group work, it matters less who is speaking than who is feeling the importance of what is being said.*

Bridging:

- Evokes meaningful talk *between* group members, *to develop emotional connections* where they did not exist before.
- Unites a ‘scattered group’, a range of people who, despite similarities, do not ordinarily identify with one another. *It is a way of getting people to expose their inner lives to one another.*
- Consists of bringing out group member’s differences as much as similarities.

Keep remembering to think about groups as working units, and do not get too diverted by the particularly compelling problem of any one individual.

We must help the group members build bridges towards one another, establishing meaningful communication – and not simply allow individuals to *speak out loud about themselves in front of the others*. This can render the rest of the group into a passive audience.

Bridging doesn’t necessarily happen through common interests or even emotional warmth between members.

- *The purpose of bridging is to bring out the latent psychic energy of the group.*

When Is Bridging Called For?

- It is often called for in the *early stages* of group formation.

- It can be used when there are *lulls* in the group energy.
- It helps *to get group members in more direct touch* with what they are thinking and doing in any given moment.
- It becomes indispensable for exploring what might be underneath *prolonged silences* in individuals, or the group itself.



Bridging With Questions

Asking the right question will invite group members to discuss what is central to them, what lies at the heart of their experience, in the immediacy of the moment.

Silence has its own intensity. But by asking a well-timed and well-placed question to a silent group member, *we can convert individual silence into group intensity*.

Bridging can also be used to address the impasse created by an individual's 'wordiness', as well as with an individual's excessive self-preoccupation, as these often go together.

Individuals tend to come to groups to air grievances and complaints about their lives, and they tend to use the group as their own private looking glass.

These types of people will tend to resent any interventions we make as the group facilitator, and will not tolerate a description of what we see them doing, or how it be affecting others.

Our best recourse to identify those in the group who seem to be most visibly affected by the ways these individuals '*exclude the presence of the other group members*', and use those group members to highlight what is going on.

Our bridging questions are put out there for anyone in the group to cross, not just to the person we direct our question.

Use bridging to address a dominating subgroup of individuals, who deprive the silent majority of its chance to talk. *We want all group members talking to each other.*

Whether people are right or wrong in the group is not so important. What matters more is that they are communicating about their experiences with one another, and building bridges themselves.

At times, our attempts at bridging questions will be initially ignored by certain group members. We may have to persist with our question, or try with *another*.

- *With bridging questions, the accuracy of anyone's perception is not to be the issue. Our aim when we bridge is not to interpret but to involve people in the group with one another – to turn the group into a coherent whole.*



Methods of Bridging

Open Ended Questions are questions that can be answered in many ways.

- *The most common form is asking one group member what he or she imagines another group member might be feeling.* This method establishes a bridge to another by a demonstration of awareness of the other person. It activates the desire to be understood.

Directed Questions are powerful forms of bridging.

- A directed question *asks a question in the form of an **interpretation***, as if something we are referring to may be a foregone conclusion.

However, we must be *cautious* about superimposing our own conceptions over the regard for the group member's own awareness of their own experience.

We must remember, when using directed questions, to remain mindful that all interpretative questions are only *invitations* for group members to form their own connections and insights, or to form a bond with another group member.

- *Each person must ultimately be approached as the authority of his or her own inner thinking, perceptions and states of mind.*

Questioning a Member About an Interaction Taking Place Between Two Others

- *This method, more than any other, taps the potentiality of the group* by unlocking inhibitions to speak out in each of the group members, especially the more timid members.

The use of a third person to bridge taps potentialities that no single individual, no matter how talented, could possess by themselves.

All techniques of bridging utilize the power of the group, the particular-ness of the group experience, and the leverage of having different people seeing the same problem, and addressing it from different vantage points.

Right and Wrong Times to Bridge

Although the purpose of bridging is to open lines of communication in the group, not all bridging accomplishes this.

When bridging with timid people, there are special considerations:

- For them, group can be a frightening place, rather than a sanctuary where they can learn to express their thoughts and feelings. Bridging must be done gingerly.
- It also should be done early in a group session, so they have the time and space to talk, or simply share their reactions to being spoken to, and asked to speak.

We must also watch for when bridging is being used, by ourselves or others, defensively, simply to reinforce our positions or to gather others to our side, perhaps in order to counter a difficult group member.



Chapter Four – How Group Helps

In an ideal group, the individuals would work so cooperatively that they would have no need for us, and the group would run smoothly without us.

The group facilitator's task is to assist a group in getting to this ideal state of functioning.

We return to the group facilitator's most essential question: *"What can happen here that could not happen in individual work, or perhaps, no where else?"*

The Benefits of Group Work

Participation in a group process should help people see how they have been unknowingly thwarting their own best efforts to achieve what they say they want, and in many cases, what they really do want.

A good group process will help people to appreciate the role that they themselves are playing in both shaping and obscuring their destiny.

In an important respect, the past is always seen through the present. Even memories differ according to the listener(s) involved, and the atmosphere in which one reports them.

- *In group work, direct interactions among its members is the primary aim.*

The Five General Benefits of Group Work

- *Groups elicit self-destructive behavior.*
- *Groups enable the members to see how others respond to them.*
- *Groups afford people diverse views of their behavior.*
- *Group process affords the opportunity for on-the-spot self-definition.*
- *Groups afford the chance to practice new behaviors.*

Groups Elicit Self-Destructive Behavior

For its long-term purposes, individual therapy sets out, from the very first session, to create an atmosphere of trust.

- *To achieve trust, an individual therapist is required proceed slowly.*

They must make few or no interpretations for a while, so as not to inhibit the flow of what the client is presenting.

- *An individual therapist tends to be mannerly, objective, warm and thoughtful.*

None of this will elicit a client's 'ordinary worst' behaviors.

- *An individual therapist draws second-hand from what a client reports having done or experienced in their lives.*

They can only surmise what actually happened from their portrayal of their part of a relationship, for example.

- *Because of these and other factors, an individual therapist must draw their own conclusions slowly.*

They must wait for the client to defeat him or herself over and over again before being sure how it happens in their lives.

The difficulty of seeing a client's core problem is compounded by the fact that many people tend to seek for their individual therapist someone they feel comfortable with.

They seek the kind of person least likely to elicit the darker aspects of the self.



- *Group process offers no such haven.*

Every group is sure to have someone who invites our self-destructive behaviors, and who elicits our own darker, disowned selves. We are likely to encounter a nemesis, have our emotional reactions evoked, and this can happen very quickly. Sometimes it is not a particular person, but the group itself as a whole, that elicits our emotional reactions and transferences.

In short, the group experience invites each group member to engage his or her own characteristic self-destructive tendencies.

- *Being interrupted and feeling misunderstood are common triggers in groups.*

Participation in groups force us to suffer interruptions, rebuttals, misunderstandings, indifference, callousness – the whole array of reactions from others that life itself subjects us to.

Sooner or later, group events that have exaggerated historical meaning will touch every member's own irrational zone, as if someone had put salt in a wound that has never truly healed.

Paradoxically, the very complaints that many individuals make about group process, and the reasons they give for preferring to only work individually, are often exactly the reasons why they should be in a group.

Two years of very good individual therapy can offer someone an invaluable experience of being understood. But that will not necessarily prepare that person *for being misunderstood* in important places in their life.

This person may also need the opportunity to be misunderstood – over and over again – and even misunderstood in exactly the way their father did it, before they can truly heal.

- *It seems ironic that people's emotional deficiencies are useful in helping others learn to cope, but it is so.*

In addition, the very *interruptive-ness* of the group experience often has value.

Even though the group can inevitably evoke disturbance in its members, it also has as a prime value that it can be remarkably nourishing and supportive to its individuals as well.

To have a roomful of allies, even just a roomful of listeners, is for many people a dream come true.

Groups Enable the Members To See How Others Respond To Them

People in group work share the advantage of having people respond to them freely, and without reservation.

Even though they can often speak for their own purposes, and not necessarily for their listeners, group members can deliver spontaneous and often keen observations.

One can reap the benefit of having people say things to him or her without hesitancy, saying what others who know the person may feel, one after the other, but do not wish to say for fear of jeopardizing the relationship.

For example, expressions of open indignation have the virtue of being made visible, and therefore get to be a part of the grist for the therapy process. It may turn out that indignation is at the very heart of the individual's problem – perhaps as a child, they were punished for every little mistake they made.

But investigating the individual's reaction to being addressed in the group - or for being called out – may prove invaluable.



Once again, an individual therapist's need to establish a therapeutic relationship, to secure it, can hold him or her back from saying what needs to be said - such as pointing out behaviors or attitudes that alienate others and creates isolation in their client's life.

An individual therapist's emphasis will often be placed on offering acceptance, understanding and providing a secure relationship. Group members do not want or need to adhere to this, and they will be free to speak without such discretion.

In a group, the members have no such need to be discreet, or wait for the relationship to strengthen, before addressing an individual's criticalness or pettiness, or tendencies to be dismissive.

When a person's behavior is paid attention to in a group, they are given the opportunity to consider that the comments of others are not rampant assaults, but perhaps useful feedback, and a genuine attempt to reach them.

What someone repeatedly hears in different settings from different people, has a chance to eventually get through, sooner or later.

Regardless of the outcome of an interpersonal exchange - what is important is that one person has the freedom to tell another person what their experience is, and this is what hurdles a group forward.

In this way, group work allows for the development of a certain "psychic robustness", between people, and this is what can help dissolve fears of disapproval.

Again, it is important to remember that these immediate emotional reactions and responses, however accurate or inaccurate, ultimately help to propel the group forward. (*Being engaging is more important than being right.*)

Groups Afford People Diverse Views of Their Behavior

- *The most apparent benefit of group process is that someone has not one person, but many, observing him or her.*

It is easier to discount what one individual says about us, but it is much harder to discount a collective observation, or the consensual opinion of the group.

In groups, we can sort through the initial emotional reactions people have towards us, in order to unearth deeper learning about ourselves that is typically out of our awareness.

In this view, even a group's irrational responses to a person's behavior are highly significant and potentially useful.

An individual cannot easily escape the consensus view of them by a group. Even when a highly trained therapist can't convince someone to reconsider a longstanding trait, the group can prevail.

In addition, the individuals in a group have the curious benefit of having other group members see him or her from their particular biases. When group members opinions concur, despite these biases, the person they concur about is very likely to take stock of what they are being told.

In polite society, those who react adversely to us typically walk away, seldom telling us how we alienated them.

In a group process, those very people whose responses are most acute, and who could inform us best about ourselves, whose very exaggerations are necessary to help us see our own flaws, will bestow upon us the gift of their response so that we can profit.

Yielding On-the-Spot Experience

- *A group process offers its members valuable in-the-moment emotional awareness for each person.*

The ability of the group to do this *in vivo* work can be very transformative.

Each person gets to see him or herself in motion, and can capture the feelings that activate them in that moment.

This is a subtle value of group work – that people can make instantaneous readings of themselves, catching and labeling fleeting feelings that are important in their psyches, but that in daily life are typically gone before they can be captured.

The power of a group to do emotional awareness work - *in-the- moment, in-the-room* - is sweeping.

Those moments when lurking feelings are at maximum energy and most susceptible to coming into awareness and being named, tend to *come when a person is busily engaged in interchanges*, and they are gone by the time the exchange has ended.

Because group processes provide the arena and offer participants an opportunity for *spontaneous introspection*, they enable people to identify and name deeper feelings and motives.

For example - a group member was able to see, in the moment it was happening, that his ways of helping people stifled anyone's potential dissatisfaction with him. He could confront his own pseudo-generosity, and see it as a device to secure love – which in the end, cut off any chance for a truly loving relationship.

His *in-the-moment* group experience freeze-framed for him his unconscious motive, and held it up to the light for him to examine more closely.

People will find immediate rewards in everyday life for behaviors that are actually self-defeating. Because they seem to fare so well for others, these behaviors tend to go unexamined.

Our ability to pinpoint people's behavior, and track it while they are engaging in it, often leads us to truths that people might find unacceptable at first, but are liberating in the end.

Sometimes, a whole subgroup, and not just an individual, is engaging in a pattern driven by an unidentified motive.

For example, three people in a group can band together to use group rules and norms to bully those they find unable to uphold them. They may all be people who are tyrannical in the personal lives, sanctimonious, and tending to portray themselves as the last law-abiding citizens in a decaying world.

Examining our underlying motives about behaviors happening *in-the-moment* may or may not lead us to change. However, our deepened recognition of our motives gives us our fullest options from which to make personal choices.

The values of *on-the-spot, in-the-moment* emotional awareness that group affords applies to the group facilitator as well, and not just the individual members.

Groups Provide Opportunities to Practice New Behaviors

The step from the group to the world is a much shorter one than the step from the individual therapist's office to the world.

- *A well-run group tolerates changes, and actually encourages them.*

Group members who do break through personal barriers are very likely to get instant appreciation, or at least recognition, of their achievement.

Group members can also see changes taking place in an individual that the individual themselves does not yet see, and call that individual's attention to them.

What is important is how the group is able to react in novel ways to the person who has begun to behave differently.

- *Because group members are so varied, they can have a wide range of responses to a person trying out a new behavior.*

This is essential to self-development. No individual therapy, and no single person, can do this.

Each person in the group must have the opportunity to joust with their 'personal demons', and they need to practice this jousting over and over again, until the new behavior becomes established and more effortless.

This is especially valuable for the other members who also identify with the newly emerging behavior.

- *With group work, a person who succeeds for one's self is also succeeding on behalf of the entire group.*

When the group is connected, one person's risking taking and new trying out new chances provides the same possibility for the others. *A rising tide lifts all the boats.*

Role-playing, although a useful technique, can also stop the spontaneous flow of the group.



Chapter Five – What the Therapist Feels

As therapists, our own connection to our humanity is our instrument, and our real feelings are the essence of our humanity.

We can come to trust *whatever* we feel, and still be in command of what we choose to do. Our own feelings are an ultimate source of our power as therapists.

We must explore the range and types of feelings we have, and how we hold them and think about them, so we can use them for a wide variety of purposes in the group.



Transference – is the sum total of the *client's* perceptions, reactions, ideas, and feelings from the past that he or she brings into the present.

No specific act is needed from the therapist or the group to evoke transference; the mere existence of the therapist or the group is enough to elicit it.

Transferences, where they occur, appear *independently* of what the other actually does.

The *therapist* can also have transference with the client; it occurs independently of anything that the client does. (E.g. – when the client looks just like the therapist's uncle).

Countertransference – is the therapist's *reactions* to the client's behaviors, that are colored by the therapist's own past. *It is the therapist's unconscious reaction to the client's unconscious feelings/behaviors.*

Countertransference is a reaction to something that has happened; **transference** is a "preconceived super- imposition" that occurs without any stimulation from the client.

The Detection of Feelings Through Other Cues

- Those feelings that may prove most instrumental to our process work are not so evident. They lurk in rumblings, intimations, impulses, nagging thoughts, etc.
- The most prevalent cues are *fantasies*, which are often accompanied by *impulses*.
- *Slips of the tongue, amnesia in the moment, autonomic habits of body posture* are other cues.

Disappointment & Discordant Reactions

- One of the most usual feelings to come over us when a process is going not well is **disappointment**. This usually occurs when the emotional quality of an individual or group session has become 'frozen'. It is a shared "blind spot", or a shared desire not to feel a certain way about us, or towards the therapist or group member.
- **Discordant reactions** in the therapist, feelings that seem quite the contrary to what is going on in the session, much more often than not are pathways to

significant insight. They tend to indicate underlying character issues and patterns that go undetected, and thus uncorrected, over a lifetime. Toxic traits survive in proportion to the difficulty in seeing them.



Chapter Six – Orchestrating a Group

Fundamentally, in a group we are observing two phenomena above all others:

- *How members express new feelings toward one another.*
- *How they evolve their emotional relationships* – how they relate to one another in some new way.

We investigate, primarily, the contexts where this is not happening – that is, where the group is stagnant in our eyes.

Applications of Bridging - Investigative Questions

Much of our success as investigators lies in our ability to recognize similarities among our group members, *especially those not immediately apparent*, but nonetheless strong.

We look to find the “feeling-double” of the other in the group, what Ormont calls the “dopple-ganger”, or “ghost-double”.

- Asking a question that points out *a similarity between how two different group members act*. (“That’s your pattern, too, isn’t it Laura? Don’t you also...”)
- Asking a question that calls forth *a similarity between the group member’s underlying feelings*, even though they might act quite differently.

(“Tom, what do you make of Steve’s silence concerning his ongoing troubles with his wife?” – when we may be aware that Tom has similar troubles)

Applications of Bridging - More Investigative Questions

- Asking a question so a group member can find someone else’s “feeling-double” (Jessica, do you know anyone else here like that?)
- Asking a **reconstructive** question that searches for a “feeling-double” in the form of a significant person from the group member’s past.

Reconstructive questions not only bridge time, but also pique curiosity so all members think more about their own past.

(“Does Andrea’s behavior remind you of anyone else’s behavior from your past?”)



Chapter Seven – Stepping In Hard

There are times when indirect, subtle and/or sophisticated methods fail, or are too slow or insubstantial to have an effect. Sometimes we must step in hard, and make a decisive statement for the whole group to hear, with enough force to make our point. We must stand up as the authorities we truly are.

Confrontation is reserved mainly for times when the group has congealed in such a way that they are not useful to one another, or when the group forms a strong, secret alliance that feels impenetrable.

Sometimes this is traceable to the subtle workings of a single individual whom the rest dread. This individual presents as either dominant, or excessively fragile.

When we bring up the unmentionable, we may find ourselves at odds with the entire group, and not just a single offender. This is often because the secret motivation of the other members in not “casting the first stone” is their desire to avoid retaliation in the form of exposure of their own flaws, real or imagined.

Sometimes the group will coalesce against an individual for virtually everything he or she does. Then it becomes taboo to take the victim’s side, which is what we must do, and begin to confront the group on its embrace of a lynch-mob mentality.

The only valid reason for confronting a group about some recalcitrant attitude it holds is to free the group itself from the tyranny of that fixed attitude. We need to be in service of liberating group members to see themselves in a new perspective, and to form new possibilities in relationships.

Healthy detachment and/or a matter of fact approach, always a prerequisite for our most aspects of our work, has its highest priority when we decide to confront people directly.

With confrontation, the subject matter can be so strong that it needs an especially light touch when being communicated, and it needs to be devoid of any strong emotion on our part. Otherwise, the receiver will react to our emotional charge, and not our message.

The acquiescent therapist is often hiding from the group’s wrath or disappointment. Mistaken for kindness or ‘objectivity’, this lack of firmness or directness can be a compensation the therapist’s fear of being attacked or becoming unpopular.

Confrontation, when necessary, is fundamental to an essential deepening process, and our popularity is far less important than our ability to produce meaningful outcomes.



Chapter Eight – Don’t Be a Fixer

“*Don’t fix what isn’t broken.*” This axiom is more obvious to us as therapists. Yet therapists also have the companion fault of “fixing what *is* broken”.

Fixing often takes the form of attempting to make adjustments *for* our group members that in reality *they must make themselves*.

Only with experience do we tend to learn that we cannot cure anyone. We accomplish nothing lasting if we try to fix people’s patterns ourselves.

- *Ideally, our role should be merely to bring to the surface our clients’ self-destructive tendencies – to help them see themselves.*
- *Sometimes, the hardest thing for us to do is **wait**.*
- Allow patterns to play themselves out, let awareness develop over time, etc.

Our jumping in with our comments or corrections may prompt a quick change of behavior, while compromising and depth of understanding of what the problem is with the behavior, and why it happens.

- *Learn to oppose blunt attempts to change or stifle harmful patterns immediately or prematurely.*

This will only render superficial or temporary changes or tend to *suppress* the harmful pattern. (This is simply fleeing into health!)

- *Allow people to witness their patterns **consciously**, as opposed to actively attempting to change them.*

Group members need to be internally motivated to examine their troubling behavior pattern *as it is happening*. They must recognize that is depriving them of certain fruits of life; that it is exerting an undesired impact on others; recognize it happening in the moment, experience it happening, and ultimately uncover why it happens.

Groups will also tend to stifle or prematurely stop a group member’s harmful pattern; *don’t go along with the group!*

To change a pattern, a person must see their pattern for themselves, as it is being enacted, repeatedly. Only after a person comes to appreciate what they do *at the instant they do it*, can they truly assimilate the pattern that is doing so much harm.



We are not fixers. Any attempt of ours to induce a remedy on behalf of someone else bespeaks a disbelief in the healing power of that individual or that group's process.

If we allow the individual or group to remedy themselves, they will do more than just fix the problem – more than just return to some original state of function. They will lift themselves into a transcendent state, one that we ourselves might have never imagined.

So we learn to let people go on doing what they have always done, but this time *consciously*. By engaging in their pattern in the here and now, they can watch it and understand it, as they never have before.

Then, maybe for the first time, they can see how their particular behavior affects other people.

In a curious way, our approach is to be as compassionate and as patient with the group member's self-destructive behavior, as if they had an infinite amount of time to continue it. This provides the space and opportunity for they themselves to want to quit the behavior, once they feel the pain of what it causes for themselves.

In summary, a suppression of harmful patterns can actually increase our distance from the ultimate goal, which is to have the person:

1. Become aware that they are repeating some activity that doesn't work, that deprives them of certain fruits of life – or is exerting an undesired impact on people they care about.
2. Recognize clearly what they are doing that doesn't work, and experience it happening in the moment.
3. Discover why they are doing what doesn't work.
4. Finally, achieve mastery over it.

Once again, our purpose is to have the group do nothing to fix its group members, or to immediately change their behaviors. Each group member will change when they are ready to let go of what doesn't work.

- *What we want to achieve, solely, is the creation of a group space that can hold and withstand an other in their ordinary worst, so that this person can see clearly what they do and how others experience it.*



Chapter Nine – The Geography of Resistances

Devices of ours that we thought we once needed now bar the way to making new and better adaptations. We can't learn the new if we refuse to let go of the old.

An early learned habit expresses itself as the person's 'resistance' in the group. It deprives a person of their chance to evolve any close relationship and to reap its benefits.

Resistances are mechanisms of repression and sameness, embedded in the character structure. They show themselves as mechanisms that once worked for the person, or seemed to work, but that now stand in the way of emotional growth.

Resistances are in integral part of every person's psychic structure; they are the part of repression that we can actually see in the person in front of us.

Resistances are activities whose aim is to keep inconvenient or uncomfortable truths from emerging, especially related to deeper feelings.

Resistances express not just the person's past, but his or her ongoing dealings with others.

"Resistance is the forces that curb attachment to the group, that interfere with sharing experiences, and that undermine solidification and consolidation."
- Edrieta Fried



We can identify resistances by observing that which keeps the group from moving forward.

- When people talk about their feelings and reactions to each other, they profit more than when they only talk about themselves or even their problems.
- When they about their reactions to other group members, they do better than when they restrict themselves to reporting on outside relationships, or experiences that the rest of the group can have only secondhand.
- Group members do better when they come to their sessions on time.
- Group members do better when they express themselves through words, vs actions.

Sub-group resistances work to keep material from surfacing in the group, as well as ideas or feelings that they conjointly fear and wish to suppress.

Sub-group resistances become even more important to deal with than individual resistances, since they have more power to set the tone of the group, or to limit it or even destroy it.

The ultimate danger to group progress is a whole group's joining in a resistance, as by refusing to deal with a member's anger or sexuality, or even passivity.

With group resistances, we see the wholesale congealment of an entire group in its effort to avoid a certain truth and the feelings that would accompany it if the truth were accepted.

As facilitators, we may feel tempted to let a group resistance pass than a sub-group resistance. Especially if the group seems content with its mode of operating, we may not want to identify that mode as a resistance.

To do so, we would have to stand alone, to be unpopular, to cite failure in a context that superficially seems to pass muster.

- Keep in mind that all resistances are contagious.
- Resistances are also seductive.

All resistances promise peace as a way of avoiding some unpleasant truth or reality, or to avoid moving, or to start getting on with the journey of living.

The recognition that whole groups, and not just individuals, may conspire to keep the peace rather than face the unknown, is somewhat new.

The keys to working with resistances are:

- To recognize the presence of them in action.
- To describe their precise operation (to ourselves, if not to others).
- To attempt to resolve them.

If not seen or dealt with, a resistance can cause a group to hobble along pointlessly, or to fall apart.

On the other hand, once we identify a resistance, whatever its form, and deal with it therapeutically, we can resolve lifelong problems not amenable to any other approach.



Chapter Ten – The Resistances – Their Curious Desirability

Do we want group members to resist us or not? Most of the time, with no resistance, there can be no actual growth.

Geniality As Resistance

When someone comes across as friendly, agreeable, helpful, tending towards being quiet, and seems free of inner conflict - we can do *nothing* for them therapeutically to help them develop as people.

Talking As Resistance

A resistance that might be called 'talking away' real life – uses discussing about feelings endlessly as a way of not feeling. A group member co-opts the vocabulary of feeling, or warmth, using the standard ways of getting close to people as a method of keeping them at a distance.

We slowly become uneasy with the two types of people above. As nice as they are, they aren't evolving with the group. In fact, their behavior will subtly inhibit the others.

To help any group member, we must identify whatever resistance he or she throws up at us, and these more sophisticated resistances make it hard to do this.

- Therefore, we *want* our group members to resist us *in the group* – to create stumbling blocks for themselves in front of us, in exactly the way that they do it in the real world.
- No matter how uncomfortable resistances make us feel, no matter how much they seem to hinder us, the presence of those resistances is desirable, *even necessary*, if we are to do our job.
- The paradox of resistances is thus that, though they inhibit progress in one sense, they are vital to progress in another.
- Resistance is not merely a theoretical or intellectual paradox. *We feel it* with each person.

With virtually every group member, there comes a time, sooner or later, when we feel the brunt of that person's resistance. Predictably, this is to be our experience before we identify the resistance.

Unless we remain open to experiencing the resistances thrown at us, we are lost.

High on the list of plain and undisguised resistances are those that amount to any clear and present breaking of the group process agreements or contracts regarding attendance, arriving late, and being present when they are there.

When exploring the resistances named above, a useful method of investigating a person's more obvious resistances by asking group members about it. Such methods are usually better than asking the group member him or herself.

- Always we want to invite exchange among group members, and not just do individual work with that person in a group, especially when someone who has continually resisted us.
- Make no mistake – blatant resistances are nearly always conscious.

There is less challenge to our skill level when resistances are obvious to all.



Why Resistances Become Subtle

The subtle resistances, such as 'unflagging congeniality' and 'nonstop pseudo-therapeutic talking' about feelings, are designed – perhaps unconsciously by those who use them - to conceal what lies underneath, to camouflage their underlying feelings.

- The subtle resistor has an investment in not having his or her resistance seen and identified.

The genial person conceals their resistance against others knowing what they really think or feel, and they may as well hide their method of hiding it, using as their shield a socially acceptable or welcomed style. Such compounded-ness of defenses is commonplace.

We can remake our resistances continuously, eliminating the obvious aspects that would give the resistances away. People care about how they are being seen.

- The function of every resistance is to preserve an unacceptable part of the self.

Shared Resistances

Group resistances differ from individual resistances. The most obvious is quantitative.

With group resistances, not just one person but many, and in some cases a whole group, are working in consort, resisting an understanding of themselves.

Tending to arrive late for group is a way to minimize one's exposure to the group. If the group accepts this, it supports them in also doing the same.

Sometimes, resistances are created to avoid the underlying feeling of *disappointment* – either in the group therapist, or in the group itself. In essence, disappointment is characterological, and at the core, they are likely to be disappointed in themselves.

Also, by facing their disappointment in the therapist or the group, the person would also have to investigate the pattern of disappointment in their lives. They may fear this level of self examination, especially if it would reveal any tendencies to avoid responsibility for their own lives.

Though such a process of self-discovery is the route a group member must take, it is painful to do so. They can avoid this by even taking the first step, which is addressing their feeling of disappointment.

It is clear that we need not simply stifle a resistance. Rather, it is to get the group to identify any resistance, and to address it.

Only by becoming aware of their resistances, by seeing themselves actually engaging in them, not once but again and again, can group members put their resistances aside if they so wish.

Not all group members will do this. However, over a period of time, those who find more rewarding ways of adapting in their lives will turn to those better methods. The choice will be theirs. Our task is to give them the freedom to make that choice.



Chapter Eleven – Unveiling Resistances

One thing is very important to note. For members to go on with their resistances, they must succeed to at least some degree. This means that these resistances must in some measure be protecting the group members from full confrontation with a painful truth about themselves.

- *Resistances must be carried on in the dark, and some may, in fact, manufacture darkness.*
- *If one knows fully what the truth is and how one conceals it, a resistance itself becomes worthless.*

Therefore, our method of dealing with resistances must center on helping our group members *become aware of their resistances* – that is, aware of their form and function.

Resistances lose their strength in daylight.

We want the group itself to do this pinpointing of resistances, *as much on their own as they can.*

Our aim of having resistances revealed is so central to us that we don't just welcome them. We need our group members to play out their resistances in every variation and in every detail.

In general, we need group members to show their resistances from every aspect and angle so that the group can see those diverse expressions, and help these group members see them, too.

As the number of expressions of a resistance mounts, the theme begins to become obvious and inescapable. The more often a person sees their resistance and its expression, the easier it becomes to let go of the resistance.

In order to bring resistances to light, we need a group environment to be at least reasonably accepting of all the members. The presence of a highly critical person, for instance, makes it quite hard for people to admit to their resistances.

We need to have group members express the pattern in their resistances repeatedly, and in a context that is not intrinsically suppressive or threatening.

Of primary importance to us is to deal with behavior in the group that would terrify or stifle other group members – behavior that would seem to justify their resistance to exposing themselves.

When we find someone who is disdainful or a hostile critic in our group, we must consider as our chief priority bringing to their attention, and that of the group, what they are doing and how it affects others.

Surfacing Resistances Of Individual Members

1. One ideal method is to find a pair of group members, one of who engages in a resistance and the other has in some respect *been victimized by this kind of resistance*, and thus has a sensitivity to it. We ask the victim of this resistance to identify it in the group.
2. A second method is to have it described by *someone who engages in the same resistance*, or once did, and as gone past it, and has perhaps started to gain insight into it, or who has worked through the underlying feelings.
3. A third method for surfacing resistances is to *ask the group as a whole what they think is missing in an individual*.
4. The fourth method is that of our *re-creating the situation that evokes the resistances so that they will be easily to identify in the group members*.

Surfacing Shared Resistances

It can never be stated too often that group work typically presents us with collective resistances. Resistances shared by many members may be harder to discern, because our potential observers – the other members – are part of the problem.

In addition, the members engaging in the resistance are supporting one another. However, collective resistances are what we must deal with most often.

We might *ask the whole group* what they think is lacking not in any one person, but in the group as a whole.

Sometimes, no one mentions much about the group leader. While it is obvious that members have some unspoken attitude toward the group leader, it is not clear what the actual underlying feeling or attitude is. This kind of omission is common.

In this case, we can ask the group why they suppose we are not mentioned, or ask a particular member their impression. The responses are not as important as having raised it as an awareness.

When we notice that something is being utterly overlooked or missing in a group, and is therefore, presumably, being avoided by all the group members together, *we may furnish the missing element ourselves in order to call attention to the resistance.*

(When we notice a group member being scapegoated, or when a group's response to a member's imperfections is 'over the top'.)

Certain techniques, which we would not use for dealing with an individual's resistance, are superbly applicable when a whole group shares a resistance.

Most notable is that of *the therapist's engaging in the resistant behavior him or herself.*

An example is the therapist purposely coming late to group, when addressing it with the group has not had impact.



Chapter Twelve – Resolving Resistances

Resistances are adamant, like the rest of one's personality, and in the long run, this is a good thing.

It is rare person who can put aside a resistance simply on learning what it is. They must learn to see how they block out painful realities, and how they do so habitually. They must see this occurring not once, but many times.

Certain group members require repeated mention of their resistance to be offered to them, *in virtually the same words*, for them to get a grip on what they are doing.

Prognostication

The first method of loosening the grip of a resistance we might loosely call the device of prognostication. *This involves group members to talk directly to the resistant person about the likely outcome of their persistent pattern.*

The sum total of the collective comments from the group as a whole impact quite differently than an individual might anticipate or expect. This is typically what happens during an classic drug or alcohol intervention.

The Secret Desire That Lies Behind The Resistance

The second method of loosening the grip of a resistance is to reveal the secret desire that lies behind the resistance.

Almost certainly, every resistance has at least one fervent wish underlying it.

This is an illustration of how, when one is unable to embrace the positive and affirming forces of life, they must inevitably embrace the negation of movement forward.

Secondary Gains

The third method of helping a group member reconsider his or her resistance, and eventually discard it, is to help that group member see the resistance's *secondary gain*.

There is an underlying benefit, one that is not often obvious, to self-destructive behavior. What are the ill-gotten but hidden advantages of employing a resistance – such as self-defeat, for the masochist?

Virtually every resistance, for instance, provides some sense of relief. The resisting person anticipates some dire outcome of an ordinary event. The resistance is always against some form of imagined calamity.

If the person is to be set free, he or she must identify the imagined threat and subject it to what Carl Jung called the '*antiseptic power of consciousness*'.

In every case, the emotional recognition of the gain inherent in a resistance deepens the person's experience of the pattern, and ultimately helps the person to drop it entirely.

Also notice that the secondary gain from a resistance is often not its motive.

With resistances, the relief obtained by resisting is often what holds it in place. By helping a group reveal to an individual that benefit of relief, they can begin to see for themselves they gain very little in exchange for the freedom and flexibility that they are surrendering.

Naturally, there is some apprehension behind every resistance.

A client will often rather talk about how much desire they have to love and be loved, than explore the depths of fear they have about being unloved and unlovable.

- *It is important to note that people will be far more ready to appreciate their resistances and deal with them when they can conceptualize them as forms of aspiration rather than as forms of flight.*



Resistance to Group Work

Group work itself, because it is done in an interpersonal context, evokes a resistance in its varied forms, and does this quickly.

A well-attended, full group is almost sure to contain members who evoke one another's resistances, and careful selection of group members can ensure this.

- *As we reveal a resistance to a group member, as we show its motives and gains but also its drawbacks, we leave it up to that member to decide when he or she will discard the resistance, and in favor of what instead.*

Sometimes, a group member will discard one resistance for another, and this can be disheartening.

One positive is that a new resistance is unlikely to be as adamant as the old one. Another is that the group member, while employing a new resistance in the group, may have elsewhere softened his defensive patterns to people.

We must be mindful of a resistance that a group member has newly shed, and the group needs to be able to appreciate what the member is doing differently, now. This needs to come from the group, and not just us.

Ideally, as a group facilitator, we ourselves are not the ones that should be motivating a group member with either praise or criticism. The more the group itself does this, the more the group as a whole will profit.

Regression back into an old resistance always remains a possibility.

Resolving resistances is painstaking but rewarding work to both the group members and to the group facilitator. Even at best, it tends to be a repetitive process, and we go back to step one over and over again – but usually, from newer and better perspectives.



Chapter Thirteen – Borrowed Robes – Transference in Group

Chapter Fourteen – Resolving Transferences

Chapter Fifteen – Confirming New Identities

(All Coming In the Fall of 2017)