A Feminist Group Experience

Report of a graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Counseling and Guidance

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To the members of the group, I extend my gratitude for their involvement and genuineness.
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INTRODUCTION

There will come a time, I know, when people will take delight in one another, when each will be a star to the other, and when each will listen to his fellow as to music. Then free men will walk upon the earth, men great in their freedom. They will walk with open hearts, and the heart of each will be pure of envy and greed, and therefore all mankind will be without malice, and there will be nothing to divorce the heart from reason. Then life will be one great service to man! His figure will be raised to lofty heights--for to free men all heights are attainable.

Then we shall live in truth and freedom and in beauty, and those will be accounted the best who will the more widely embrace the world with their hearts, and whose love of it will be the profoundest; those will be the best who will be the freest; for in them is the greatest beauty. Then will life be great, and the people will be great who live that life.

Maxim Gorky

The above quotation (Luft, 1970) expresses some of the basic yearnings of human beings--to know--to listen--to feel--to be. Perhaps the hearts of people will never "be pure of envy and greed" . . . and "without malice" but there is a need and a search for human contact and freedom of expression that has moved parts of our society toward the group movement.

Carl Rogers considers the encounter group as "perhaps the most significant social invention of this century" (Rogers, 1968). Maslow (1965) also views group experiences as "genuine contributions for growth and increased psychological soundness."
The essential ingredient of encounter groups involves an environment "that is conducive to openness and acceptance, learning, understanding, and growth" (Luft, 1963). The process of learning how people interact and react, verbally and nonverbally is complicated, and at times, painful and anxiety producing. It can, however, be alive, exciting, viable, and stimulating.

As stated by Luft (1970) there has been a great deal of criticism directed toward encounter and sensitivity groups from both professionals and the lay public. Some well informed critics feel that there is need for more research, and a need for minimal professional standards for leaders, while others feel that this is the devil's work or in the control of "Communist brainwashers."

The nonverbal techniques seem to unleash the most negative furor. The thought of touching in our Anglo-Saxon world is indeed "touchy." The opportunity to touch in a non-charged setting is almost non-existent compared to other cultural groups. The blocking of our avenues for touching has led to its expression only through sex or violence—over-burdening our reactions in those areas. While nonverbal techniques can be extremely useful in terms of heightening awareness and hastening human contact, they must be used selectively and only when their use seems meaningful in terms of the needs of the group members.
Luft (1963) feels that the unstructured group experience may "prove to be as valuable as Freud's free association." In each method the relationship among the persons creates, "a willingness to risk, a sense of humanistic enterprise, a spirit of fresh inquiry . . ."

Groups have actually existed throughout human history and even before in the society of primates. Why then this upward surge of the "group movement" since World War II? Perhaps it is a sought for answer to the feelings of alienation, powerlessness and our negative reactions to the pressures of our changing world. This could be called a move toward community and human interaction on a basic feeling level.

Apparently each person is subject to the rhythm of his body, and a description of this rhythm can affect behavior in areas such as job functioning, stamina under stress, etc. (Luft, 1970). This indicates that this is one area in which one's adaptability is limited by physiological functioning. People may have other limits that suffer from modern life's stresses, as well.

Society is changing at an accelerated rate in family life, in communication and transportation, in art, in environment, in politics, in community, in values-- testing the parameters of one's ability to adapt. Toffler (1970) claims that feelings of apathy, irritation, confusion, anxiety and senseless violence are evidence of a
"disease of too much change in too short a time."

Transience is the term Toffler (1970) uses to label the cultural and psychological effects of change. The following is a list of some of the factors reflecting the accelerated changes people and society are experiencing (Luft, 1970).

1. Population: "The time required to double the world's population has dropped from 1,000,000 years to 1,000 years, to 200 years, to 80 years, until now. At present accelerated rate of population growth, the earth's population will double in 35 years" (Ehrlich, 1969).

2. Production: The gross national product of goods and services in the 21 advanced nations of the world is doubling every decade and a half.

3. Scientists: Between 85 and 95 percent of all scientists who ever lived are alive in 1970.

4. Energy: Approximately half of all the energy consumed in the last 2,000 years was consumed in the last 100 years. The rate of increase in consumption is itself increasing at an accelerated pace.

5. Speed: The top speeds of transportation never exceeded 20 miles per hour until the mid-19th century. Rockets now take man at over 20,000 miles per hour, and commuter speed for many exceeds the speed of sound.

6. Innovation: The innovative cycle between a new idea and its application has shortened from as much as a millenium to a few years. Combinations of inventions, including those using computers, have drastically speeded up new inventions.

7. Moving: Approximately 36,000,000 people move from one place to another each year in the United States.
8. Books: In four and a half centuries, the publication of new books has increased from 1,000 a year to 1,000 a day.

9. Scientific literature: The number of journals and articles appears to be doubling every 15 years, with a current output of some 20,000,000 pages per year.

10. Information: The number of words and ideas taken in daily by the average adult from newspapers, magazines, radios, and television has risen sharply, and new technologies to increase the speed of information flow proliferate at a rapid rate.

Add to this environmental pollution, the Viet Nam War, racism, sexism, and poverty and it is easy to understand why men and women are experiencing stress, anxiety and alienation.

Most of these changes cannot and some probably should not be stopped, however there is a need for humanizing social controls. The quality of human interaction needs to regain a sense of meaning and worth. Small temporary groups may be one means to this end. The supportiveness and relevance of a group with its concern primarily for people may alleviate some of the deprivation. There is power and worth in face-to-face interaction. People will come together to share experience and gain support through periods of crisis and growth. The group may be one place where one feels he or she has some control over himself/herself and the ongoing process (Luft, 1970). The group movement seems to be a viable response
to the challenge of our time.

The purpose of this paper is to take a look at groups; their historical development, the dynamics and processes of groups, and the development of one particular group and its participants.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the following sections this author will briefly discuss the history of groups, the group process and the current literature.

Partial History of the "Group Movement"

The word group, as it is used here, will refer to a planned, intensive group experience. Some common terms used for such groups are "T-group," "encounter group," "sensitivity training." It is a relatively new movement that is developing almost entirely outside the "establishment" (Rogers, 1970).

The work of Kurt Lewin, a psychologist working at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, bore fruit when the first T-group (T stands for training) was held in Bethel, Maine in 1947. This was shortly after Lewin's death. Lewin and his staff had "developed the idea that training in human relations skills was an important but overlooked type of education in modern society." (Rogers, 1970).

People who had worked with Lewin continued to organize training groups at MIT and the University of Michigan. As an outgrowth of the summer groups at Bethel an organization known as the National Training Laboratories was formed, with headquarters in Washington, D. C.,
that is still functioning and growing steadily. Industry has made use of their services for its top level personnel.

Initially, the purpose was to train groups to observe and enhance an individual's interactions with others in the group, but many people had very deep personal experiences of change in their ability to trust and care for other group members.

In 1946 and 1947, Carl Rogers and his associates at the University of Chicago were involved in training counselors for the Veteran's Administration. They felt the most effective training would be a group experience rather than limiting it to cognitive training. The experiment was successful and the procedure was incorporated in the training program.

The Chicago groups were primarily aimed "toward personal growth and the development and improvement of interpersonal communication and relationships" (Rogers, 1970). This legacy has gradually become an integral part of the intensive small group experience. The basic format has been incorporated by many different philosophical and psychological schools, such as Synanon and Gestalt Therapy groups. Groups exist in a multitude of settings, as well: churches, colleges, industry, "growth centers," etc. The growth of this phenomenon seems to be a spontaneous grass-roots development. It mainly appeals to people who are sufficiently affluent to afford the luxury
of being aware of their psychological deficiencies (Rogers, 1970).

The above is a capsule survey of the origins of "groups" in the United States. How far and for how long and to what purpose--this movement?--is yet to be seen.

Group Process

Much is being written pertaining to group process. The following sampling of current views can be helpful in clarifying group modes and dynamics.

Groups have certain common characteristics. They are usually small (from eight to eighteen members), relatively unstructured, choosing their own goals and directions. The leader is almost always there to facilitate the expression of thoughts and feelings of group members. The group focus is usually on the process and dynamics of personal interactions.

The following are basic aspects of the group experience that probably fit a majority of groups: (Rogers, 1970)

- A leader can develop a psychological climate of safety in which freedom of expression and reduction of defensiveness may occur.

- Many immediate feeling reactions of each member toward others, and himself, tend to be expressed.

- A mutual trust develops that leads each member toward greater acceptance of his own being--emotional, physical, and intellectual--as it is as well as what it can become.
People lose their defensive rigidity and there is a greater possibility for change in their attitudes and behavior.

With a decrease in defensiveness people can hear and learn from each other and themselves. People become more aware, generally.

From the feedback of others, an individual learns how he appears and what his impact is in interpersonal relationships.

With improved communication, innovation can become a desirable rather than a threatening possibility.

These learnings in the group tend to carry over, temporarily or more lastingly, into relationships outside the group.

People develop closeness and intimacy which they have never felt before with anyone--because they have revealed themselves more deeply and fully.

Luft (1970) in his book, Group Processes, presents a graphic model of awareness in interpersonal relations known as the Johari Window. This model gives us a way of examining our own behavior in relation to others.
<table>
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<th>Known to Self</th>
<th>Not Known to Self</th>
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<tr>
<td>OPEN</td>
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<td>3</td>
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**Figure 1. The Johari Window**

- **Quadrant 1:** this is the open area of free activity, refers to behavior and motivation known to self and known to others.

- **Quadrant 2:** the blind area, is where others can see things in ourselves of which we are unaware.

- **Quadrant 3:** the avoided or hidden area, represents things we know but do not reveal to others (e.g., a hidden agenda or matters about which we have sensitive feelings).

- **Quadrant 4:** the area of unknown activity, points to the area where neither the individual nor others are aware of certain behaviors or motives. Yet we can assume their existence because eventually some of these things become known, and we then realize that these unknown behaviors and motives were influencing relationships all along.

When a group is just beginning Q1 is small and there is not much spontaneous interaction. As the group matures, Q1 expands in size as Q3 shrinks and members are
freer to be themselves and perceive others more clearly. There is less need to hide or deny thoughts and feelings in an atmosphere of growing trust. It takes longer for Q2 to reduce in size because these blind spots are probably self protective defenses. Quadrant 4 changes somewhat, but more slowly than shifts in Q2. Quadrant 4 is probably larger and more influential in an individual's relationships than the diagram indicates.

Luft (1970) lists the following principles of change in connection with the Johari Window Model:

1. A change in any one quadrant will affect all other quadrants.
2. It takes energy to hide, deny, or be blind to behavior which is involved in interaction.
3. Threat tends to decrease awareness; mutual trust tends to increase awareness.
4. Forced awareness (exposure) is undesirable and usually ineffective.
5. Interpersonal learning means a change has taken place so that Q1 is larger and one or more of the other quadrants has grown smaller.
6. Working with others is facilitated by a large enough area of free activity. An increased Q1 means more of the resources and skills in the membership can be applied to a task.
7. The smaller the first quadrant, the poorer the communication.
8. There is universal curiosity about the unknown area, but this is held in check by custom, social training, and diverse fears.
9. Sensitivity means appreciating the covert aspects of behavior, in quadrants 2, 3, and 4, and respecting the desire of others to keep them so.

10. Learning about group processes as they are being experienced helps to increase awareness (enlarge Q1) for the group as a whole as well as for individual members.

11. The value system of a group and its membership may be noted in the way unknowns in the life of the group are confronted.

Understanding this outline can help a group or an individual see more clearly the significant events in a group.

Initially in a group, using this model as a framework, interaction is relatively superficial, anxiety or threat is great, interchange is stilled and less than spontaneous. It is also apparent that ideas are left hanging and undeveloped, and people hear and see relatively little of what is happening.

In any particular group persons are considered interdependent in Q1, each is both independent and dependent in Q2 and Q3, and both are dependent in Q4.

Independence, in this case, is defined as awareness that is exclusive; and dependence is a lack of awareness of a relevant area of which the other is aware. Withholding information or feelings which pertain to the relationship is a way of controlling or manipulating the other.

Interdependence develops as group members work
out new procedures, standards, and values appropriate to the goals and resources of the group.

According to Crutchfield (1955), as expressed in Luft's book, "a group changes by restructuring the part-whole relationships into a new configuration. Changes in standards, roles, and patterns of communication influence the motivation of individuals as well as the group atmosphere. Lewin (1948) calls this an unfreezing, a change of level or standards and a refreezing at a new level. Groups achieve interdependence through resolution of differences, so that cooperation and collaboration are optimal while independence of judgement and action are maximized."

In the early dependence phase of an encounter group, there will be varied negative reactions to a leader who chooses an ambiguous role. The group is upset that the leader has failed to meet its needs and expectations. The leader is labelled weak, incompetent and manipulative.

Carl Rogers (1970) discusses the group process in his book, *On Encounter Groups*. He feels that the following patterns appear almost universally in intensive groups in roughly this sequence.

1. Milling around. - The group flounders looking for direction from the leader. Receiving none, they experience confusion, awkward silence, polite surface
talk and frustration, grappling with the question, What is the purpose of this group?

2. Resistance to personal expression or exploration. - During this phase the public self is shown--only fearfully and gradually are steps taken to reveal some of the private self.

3. Description of past feelings. - People discuss feelings and situations outside of the group--which are still present in the person but which are placed in the past and as being outside the group. The feelings the group is told exist "there and then."

4. Expression of negative feelings. - The first genuine "here and now" feeling is apt to be a negative one--expressed toward the leader or another group member. This is a way of testing the freedom and trustworthiness of the group--and of holding on to our more vulnerable warm feelings.

5. Expression and exploration of personally meaningful material. - The next step is usually for a person to reveal himself in a significant way to the group.

6. The expression of immediate interpersonal feelings in the group. - The group members begin to be aware of and express their feelings toward one another at the moment they occur. The group has come to the "here and now."

7. The development of a healing capacity in the group. - Some of the group members have a natural "capacity for dealing in a helpful, facilitating, and therapeutic" way with the pain of others in the group.

8. Self-acceptance and the beginning of change. - This is an area of confusion
for people who feel that accepting yourself as you are—is in some way giving up. What actually occurs is the person accepts himself as he really is and this allows for changes. The energy of trying to deny the self is released and more readily available for change. The person is closer to his own feelings and can be more authentic and congruent. Others can accept him as he really is—so he needn't continue to be shielded by a facade.

9. The cracking of facades. - The following stages overlap and can occur in any sequence. The group becomes impatient with defenses and images, and will challenge members to be themselves. The group insists that the individual be himself.

10. The individual receives feedback. - The individual is given a great deal of data as to how he appears to others and the impact he is having on the members of the group. This usually offered in the context of caring.

11. Confrontation. - Individuals start to "level" with each other directly. These confrontations can be positive, but they are usually negative. Sometimes this leads to better understanding between the people involved.

12. The helping relationship outside the group sessions. - The group members make themselves available to each other with understanding, support, caring and personal experience outside the group as well as in the group.

13. The basic encounter. - Once people have been real with each other they are able to make close and direct contact—feeling deeply for one another.

14. The expression of positive feelings and closeness. - Out of the realness in the group relationships, positive feelings of closeness result.
15. Behavior changes in the group. -
Physical changes in posture, gestures, 
facial expressions and tone of voice 
become apparent in different individuals.

Whether these changes continue after the group is 
over--is an area that needs investigation.

Some negative outcomes of a group experience are 
also possible. One such possibility is that there is no 
carry-over to real life situations. Another is the pos­ 
sibility of unearthing well defended conflicts that re­ 
quire the healing process of a long term therapeutic 
relationship.

The "growth" of an individual might upset the 
balance of his relationships on the outside--such as in a 
marriage or at work.

Another difficulty may occur when certain group 
members have had other group experiences and come in like 
an "old pro." They attempt to impose the "rules of the 
game" as they know them on the new members. They make 
other members feel guilty when they are unable to express 
their feelings--be they positive or negative. This limits 
true expressiveness and spontaneity in the group.

The above is a limited review of some current 
thinking vis a vis the group process. As yet the defini­
tive work in this field has not been produced. Group 
interaction is a field rich with uncharted territory that 
can lead to significant findings in the future.
Current Articles

The April, 1970, issue of the International Journal of Group Psychotherapy was devoted to a discussion of the current encounter movement. Some of the authors aired their feelings of cautiousness regarding this movement--that it needed to be researched, and handled carefully and judiciously.

The following presents some of their views for consideration.

George Thompson, in his article, "Having A Thought" (1970), raises the question as to whether thoughts as well as feelings should be explored in the group. The inquiry could be attacked as intellectualizing in the current milieu of most groups. Thompson feels however that just as people are resistant to sharing their feelings, they may also resist telling their thoughts. Thompson suggests some doubts which may come to one's mind: "Can I survive? What will happen to me? What will be demanded of me? Will I show my intellectual weaknesses? Deviance? Will others appreciate my thinking as much as I do? Will I be able to answer challenges to my thinking?"

It is apparent that these fearful thoughts are closely interwined with feelings. Perhaps some of the same procedures used to inquire into feelings might be used to reveal thought processes. The establishment of
a climate of trust and a reduction of thought-hiding defenses seems to be a likely approach.

While understanding feelings will help us see why a person does what he does, understanding thoughts will help us see what kind of a person a person is. We can examine the reasons for resistance to thought-sharing. Thompson feels that thoughts have a public quality.

Robert J. Smith, Ph.D. (1970) believes the trend toward groups is a flight from the rational, scientific, technologic and positivistic values in our culture. Although he grants that we may be reacting to the "sterile products of an overly ordered society," there is a danger of denying the critical function of intellect and emphasizing only the non-intellectual feelings. The intellect has traditionally functioned to leaven emotional excess and Smith feels we are throwing out the baby with the bath water.

Smith states that in many encounter or sensitivity groups the body assumes overriding importance, and is constantly referred back to for sensation, tensions, blocking, etc. He mentions that the body can be used to release feelings and change one's ideation, attitudes and feelings.

Smith quotes Schutz's "Joy" (1967) as follows:

A man must be willing to let himself be known to himself and to others. He must express and explore his feelings and open up
areas long dormant and possibly painful, with the faith that in the long run the pain will give way to a release of vast potential for creativity and joy.

Another danger Smith perceives is that the group participants do indeed change, but then have problems fitting in on their jobs.

The freedom of each person to choose to be in the group or not is crucial according to Smith. Then the individual is defining his own needs and treatment. This is not, however, always the case.

Smith feels some are looking to encounter groups as the panacea for all our emotional ills. While it is an interesting, and challenging therapeutic technique, "careful, long term evaluation will alone tell if the value of the method will make it a stock in trade of the practicing psychotherapist."

Morris Parloff (April 1970) expresses the idea that the need to establish safeguards is the group leader's responsibility. The leader's sensitivity to possible psychological or physical injury of a participant is imperative. "The leader must be willing to remove from the group any individual who may harm others or himself by his continued participation in the group."

Parloff feels that the encounter group movement is with us—and cannot be discussed as a fad. People report personal growth based on this experience, but these judgements are mainly subjective and may not be
followed by behavioral, personality, or performance improvements.

Parloff feels that equal respect should be given to openness, honesty and the celebration of the body on one hand, and self-denial, self-discipline and self-mastery on the other hand "as prerequisites to the joys of competence, intellectual achievement, and productivity." The "individual who has access to alternative views and alternative routes to happiness may be less despairing when he finds himself at a road block."

The authors referred to above are reflecting varying degrees of skepticism and acceptance in regard to the group movement. This is as it should be.
THE ORIGINAL GROUP PROJECT

Its Beginning

In January of 1972 it occurred to this author that a group entirely composed of women would be a rewarding growth-producing experience.

Initially, the women who came to the group were either friends of the author or people they knew of who would be interested in joining a group. We met once a week for three hours for about eight months.

The following is a biographically descriptive list of the group members:

Vivian: Vivian heard about the group through her son who was my co-volunteer counselor at a youth clinic. Vivian, a divorced woman in her later forties, who had never finished high school, was leading a lonely life—unable to make friends or form lasting relationships. When her son mentioned the group she was very interested in joining. Hers was an identity crisis. As Vivian revealed herself to the group and was accepted by them, her self assessment became more positive. She became less critical, more trusting in the group, while her outside life situation went through changes, as well. For the first time in her life she fell in love with a man, she was promoted to a job she'd been wanting at work, she became more productive as a sculptor, and finally she moved...
to an apartment on a beautiful, hillside—that she enjoyed thoroughly. A new zest came into her life. Vivian stayed with the group till the end.

**Leila:** Leila heard of the group through a friend who knew the author. Leila, a college graduate, is a divorced woman with two children at home. Although she had a well paying job that she enjoyed, she was experiencing a restlessness and dissatisfaction she could not explain. Her involvements with different men had been short-lived and unsatisfying. She was extremely anxious for the group to start. She was going through an identity crisis. It was apparent from her dialogue in the group, that she wanted solutions and answers and she resisted becoming emotionally involved with the group. Apparently some of the discussion affected her, because she experienced emotional releases (crying) when she was alone. Leila wanted to sell her house and travel to Europe but was afraid to try it—even though she had the financial ability. The group encouraged her to risk taking the trip, and so she finally did sell her house and go. At this point she left the group.

**Lee:** Lee heard about the group through a women's group. Lee came to our second group meeting in a taxi, because she was afraid to drive the freeways. Lee, a happily married woman with five children, said she came because she was climbing the walls. Lee, an energetic,
verbal woman, was an extremely talented writer, an actress and a high school drop-out. Since her marriage she had given up both writing and acting and had plunged energetically into the wife and mother role. Lee was extremely conflicted because she wanted to be productive as an individual, but it scared her too. Lee was in the grips of an identity crisis. Lee was extremely perceptive and insightful and was able to sort out her feelings with the help of the group.

As the weeks went by Lee changed her way of life. She went back to school (something she had greatly feared), became active on the advisory council of her child's school showing great organizational and leadership ability. Her fears lessened and she was able to drive herself to the meetings.

**Teresa:** Teresa, a divorced woman in her sixties, came to the group through Lee who was her friend. Teresa was a soft-spoken gentle woman who had trouble asking for room for herself. She was just completing training as a practical nurse and was looking forward to working. When she finally did get a job--she had trouble with her patient who was irritable and domineering. The group encouraged Teresa to assert herself, and when she did she stopped having trouble with her chronic ulcer. Teresa became more able to express a wider range of emotions as a result of the group experience.
Joan: Joan, a high school graduate, married with two children in her early thirties, heard about the group from a mutual friend. She came to the group depressed and practically immobilized. Joan verbalized that hers was a marital problem. Joan will be discussed in more detail later on.

Eleanor, Nancy and Lenore: These three women, all divorced and over forty, were friends who came into the group together about two months after it started. They had heard about it through a women's group and this was their first group experience. They all behaved in more or less the same manner. Eleanor was the leader of the trio and she expressed her reluctance to look at negative feelings or thoughts. She felt she had worked very hard to build a positive outlook and didn't want this destroyed. About a month after they came into the group they decided to leave.

Helen: Helen, a high school graduate, married in her forties with three sons, came into the group through Lee whom she'd met at a class in Junior College. Helen wanted to develop her potential as an individual inside and outside of her marriage. At the time she entered the group she was living on the West Coast and her husband was on the East Coast. This was a separation supposedly due to economic necessity. Helen was very empathic and understanding of other people, but was resistant to
exposing her own feelings. She very much wanted to please everyone and receive their approval. Helen never really came to grips with her own problems, but she was able to see that many of the poses she assumed were not genuine and she gradually stopped apologizing to and complimenting people. She was extremely fearful that she was a failure as a mother and that her children would suffer as a result.

**Charlotte:** Charlotte, a heavy set woman who was a friend of Helen's, came into the group about six months after it started. She expressed the desire to be a part of the group because she'd had group experiences and missed them. Charlotte a verbal, forceful divorced young woman in her early thirties had one daughter and was receiving welfare. Although Charlotte, a high school drop out, had had a series of office jobs she was unable to find work at the present time. Charlotte, Ray and Helen will be discussed further in a later section.

**Ray:** Ray, a plain looking divorced woman in her forties who had trained to be a Registered Nurse and worked as an administrator of nursing in a small hospital, entered the group about six and a half months after its inception. She also was Helen's friend, and lived with her father and her daughter. During the time she was in the group she lost her job, and moved twice. Ray was experiencing an acute identity crisis and went into a
deep depression.

The Facilitator: The author of this paper will be known as the Facilitator. The Facilitator, currently a student working towards a Master's Degree in Counseling and Guidance and for a Credential in Pupil Personnel Services, worked as a teacher until her appointment as an Area Counselor in the schools.

For two years she worked as a volunteer counselor at a youth clinic and facilitated this group and another group (for two years) that started out as her project for the Practicum required for the Master's degree.

The Facilitator is a divorced woman with two children.

The Facilitator's basic philosophy and value system regarding the therapeutic process is that women are programmed to look for their personal centers through vicarious involvement with the people around them--parents, husbands, and children. The means to their own fulfillment is the achievement of their husbands and their husband's acceptance of them as worthwhile human beings.

This kind of distorted thought and emotion leads a woman to put all her energies into her children and her husband thereby robbing from the latter their independent spheres. Men, too, suffer from this misdirected energy--since they are supported, pleased, understood, manipulated
and dealt with dishonestly they never really have to grow up.

The Facilitator's purpose was to help re-direct the women's thinking to look for their own centers and not someone else's version of their centers.

The therapy group was meant to enable these women to change rather than adjust—to become aware of their own potential as individuals, and to develop the courage to use themselves fully.

Other philosophies of psychology, such as Freud and the neo-Freudians, base their therapeutic emphasis differently from this writer. Freud (et al.) feels it is the natural state for a woman to be passive and accepting rather than active and changing. The attempt then would be to help a woman adjust to her passive role, since this is essentially her nature.

For purposes of this paper, the views of this writer will determine the basic frame of reference.

In the next section the developmental patterns of individual group members will be discussed. The first transaction will illustrate the changes Joan went through.

Joan. - Joan joined the group at our second session. For most of the evening she sat quietly, her face expressing sadness, and listened. The Facilitator asked the group to each, in turn, identify themselves as
they saw themselves. Joan said that she was a wife and a mother who was depressed, found it difficult to rouse herself to perform her duties, and was easily moved to tears. (The Facilitator attempted to bring to the surface the members' current views of themselves.)

With this Joan started to cry, saying "I don't know what I'm going to do? My marriage is breaking up, I think I love my husband, but I'm not sure. I believe in God--but I'm lost." (Joan, although she was verbalizing a marital problem, was actually experiencing an identity crisis.)

As time and the group progressed, Joan began to share her feelings and fears with the group. She was able to express and explore personally meaningful material (Rogers, 1970).

At one session the group discussed their bodies and how they felt about them. This was an exercise that enabled the women to look at some negatively felt aspects of self.

Comments

1. TERESA: If I had enough money I'd get myself a new chin. I don't like my receding chin.
2. FACILITATOR: How do you feel changing your chin will change things for you?

1-2. Here the Facilitator was encouraging Teresa to explore the feelings further.
3. TERESA: I would feel more confident about my appearance and be more attractive to men.

4. FACILITATOR: You've already been attractive enough to seven men for them to marry you.

5. TERESA: I know but I still want a new chin. Maybe I can attract better men.

6. ELEANOR: I'd like to lose some weight and have my face lifted. I don't understand why we have to talk about our negative feelings about our bodies? What good does it do? I want to think positively.

7. FACILITATOR: I didn't suggest we discuss our bodies negatively--but I guess those are your stronger feelings.

8. ELEANOR: Well, I do like the way I look when I'm dressed up and wearing a wig. I like my blonde wig best.

9. LEE: Don't you see that you all want to change or add to your bodies? It indicates to me that part of you is disgusting to you.

Comments

3-4. The Facilitator attempted to point out a distortion in Teresa's thinking.

5. Here Teresa reinforces her original defense--so she can hold on to it.

6. Here Eleanor is resistant to expressing her true negative feelings.

7. The Facilitator pointed out it was she who chose to discuss the negative aspects of her body image.

8-9. Lee is sharing another way of viewing herself that Eleanor did not have access to on her own.
10. JOAN: Well don't you feel dissatisfied with your appearance Lee?

11. LEE: No. I know I'm not beautiful, but I am uniquely me. I'm the only Lee around who looks just like me. I treasure that.

12. JOAN: I feel pretty good about my looks (She was very good-looking), but I've always wanted a new nose. I think if my nose were a little shorter and straighter I'd feel better about myself.

13. VIVIAN: Do you think you'd be more attractive to men?

14. JOAN: Yes. As soon as I can get some money I'm going to have my nose bobbed. I feel it will be sort of insurance in case I leave my husband.

15. FACILITATOR: I have a feeling I won't be able to tell the difference in you.

Comments

10-11. Lee had the courage to express an unpopular view.

12-13. Vivian is encouraging Joan to dig deeper to discover her basic feelings about her appearance.

14. Joan is expressing a feeling known to most women—that a woman's value is based mostly on her appearance.

15. The Facilitator was indicating that the change would not be as noticeable to others as it would be to Joan.

Subsequently Joan did change her nose and the Facilitator couldn't see the difference.

The distortion that becomes obvious in this discussion is that women see themselves as their bodies
and will reject part or all of this image. They despise their uniqueness because it doesn't measure up to the idealized version.

Joan revealed that her husband had had an affair that had nearly broken up the marriage. His excuse for the affair was that Joan didn't experience orgasms. The following dialogue ensued.

16. JOAN: Ever since then I've been afraid to let him know that I'm not reaching a climax--so I fake an orgasm. But, I feel so guilty about lying to him. I live in fear that he'll find out.

17. NANCY: I fake orgasm too. I bet almost every woman has at one time or another.

Other members all confirm this. Here the group is coming out from behind their public facades to give Joan feedback in a healing way (Rogers, 1970).

18. JOAN: But isn't it abnormal not to have an orgasm?

19. TERESA: (The one with seven husbands) I didn't have an orgasm till I was 42. You're

Comments

16. Here Joan is in conflict because in trying to shield her husband from the truth--she is forced to lie which goes counter to another basic value.

18. Joan reveals that she feels she is abnormal because she has not experienced orgasm.

19-20. Leila and Teresa are sharing personal intimate information with
20. LEILA: I was divorced before I experienced my first orgasm.

21. LEE: Have you ever tried masturbating?

22. JOAN: Yes, but nothing happens. Do you think I could be having one and not knowing?

23. VIVIAN: If you had one—you'd know it!

24. LEE: I want you to go home and conjure up all kinds of fantasies and try to achieve a climax by letting your imagination go while you're masturbating.

25. JOAN: O.K. I'll try it. I sure feel better to know I'm not the only one who pretends to have orgasms.


Joan also related that although she was positive that her husband loved her more than anything else in the world, he could be cruel and violent with her and the children—even to the point of putting a lighted cigarette to her leg. His rationalization being that she and the children "make" him mad. The group discussed this:
27. VIVIAN: It sounds just like my husband. A psychiatrist once said that it was amazing that I could have lived with him for 22 years before divorcing him. His violence used to scare me to death.

28. LEE: Aren't you afraid he'll hurt the children?
29. TERESA: You must be ready to protect yourself and the children. One of my ex-husbands used to beat me too—and I left him.

30. FACILITATOR: Have you considered the possibility of leaving him? How do you feel about that idea?

31. JOAN: Well I've thought about it. But he says he loves me so much and I'd be afraid to be on my own.

32. FACILITATOR: Do you feel that you couldn't cope with the responsibilities of single life?

33. JOAN: Well I am frightened.

Comments

27. Vivian is reaching out in a caring way and exposing a part of herself that she shares with Joan.

28-29. Teresa tells Joan that there are avenues of thought to be explored that may change her approach to the problem.

30. The Facilitator is asking Joan to talk about an area that she has probably thought about but has been afraid to deal with.

31. Here Joan is exposing her underlying premises that are keeping her in the marriage.

32. The Facilitator is encouraging Joan to express her fears—so that she can face them.

33. Joan is expressing a deeply buried fear that will lead her to further self-acceptance.
34. VIVIAN: Joan, you helped me more than anyone in this group. I see you as strong, capable, loving, warm and very attractive. I know you can take good care of yourself and your children if you have to.

35. JOAN: But my husband keeps picking on me and telling me how stupid I am.

36. FACILITATOR: Do you believe that you're stupid?

37. JOAN: I guess I do.

38. FACILITATOR: I sense a lot of group pressure for you to make a move that you may not want to make. I know that when the time comes--you'll be able to make a decision that is best for you. It will be in your own time and for your own good reasons.

At another session Joan said:

39. JOAN: I'm doing so much better at home now. I'm active in the PTA--even though Bill (her husband) objects to it. I have a lot more energy. I'm going out to lunch more with my friends, and I'm patient with the children. I'm doing great!
40. JOAN: I went to visit our neighbors the other day and I noticed how relaxed the relationship was between the husband and wife. She would tell him what she thought and ask for what she wanted and he didn't seem to mind at all. You think there are other ways of being married and that you don't have to walk on egg shells?

Later on Bill came home one night, drunk, woke Joan up and started to hit her. Joan took her daughters and fled to a neighbor's house. She never went back. They are now in the process of getting a divorce.

Joan developed in a very positive manner due to the group experience. The support and concern the group showed for her helped Joan's self concept improve dramatically.

The group gave her information, a sense of common experience, a feeling she would succeed if she risked being on her own, and the experience of communicating with others.

The facilitator at different points tried to make Joan aware of what her feelings were and how they were affecting her behavior. When the group was pushing to have her leave her husband, the Facilitator pointed out
to Joan that the decision was hers to make or not.

Based on Luft's Model of the Johari Window, this group increased the area of Quadrant I considerably as more became known to self and others.

Charlotte

Before the next transaction is discussed there is a need to detail the entrance of Charlotte into the group. In retrospect her entrance marked a decisive demarcation in the group process although some of the group membership overlapped.

The first evening Charlotte joined us was about six months after the group's inception. Almost immediately she attacked Lee for her use of tranquilizers calling her a drug addict.

Charlotte had learned her confronting techniques at Synanon which she had entered due to drug addiction.

Lee fell apart during the confrontation, feeling perhaps that she was addicted while also experiencing a more than adequate functional level of life.

The Facilitator felt confused at this juncture—not really being sure of what the outcome might be or what she hoped it would be. The Facilitator attempted to be supportive of Lee, without denying that there might be some truth to what Charlotte was saying.

Hindsight proved this to be a crucial blunder in the life cycle of the group, since in essence Charlotte's
"confronting" was a defense against self exploration and developing openness towards other group members.

As a result of Charlotte's behavior, the Facilitator's indecisiveness and their own unwillingness to stand their ground Lee and Teresa left the group.

The following transaction focused around Ray.

Ray

Ray, who joined the group last had a great deal of difficulty sharing painful areas of herself with the group. This particular evening Ray started to talk about a planned move back to her former house.

Comments

1. RAY: I've been thinking about moving back to the house I used to live in, but I'm not sure that it would be the right thing to do.
2. CHARLOTTE: What's wrong with the place you're at now?
3. RAY: I just don't like it. It was a bad mistake to move there. I went there to be in an area near a good school for Randy, but now I know I can't stand it--and I don't want to stay there. I went back to talk to my former landlady and she said she would have to have a security fee and a rent increase, and I don't know if I can afford it.

1-5. In this transaction Ray is expressing her inability to make up her mind and is displaying the emotional pain involved. Charlotte responds with criticism and anger towards Ray.
4. CHARLOTTE: Just the other day you told me you wanted to move back there and now you don't know again. Can't you make up your mind?

5. RAY: No I can't! Sometimes I think one way and sometimes another. It's hard to know what's right.

6. FACILITATOR: (Feeling Ray's vulnerability) I hear a lot of pain in your voice when you talk about your indecision, what does it feel like to you to make a wrong decision.

7. RAY: It feels like I'm a complete failure, and that my daughter would be better off without me.

8. CHARLOTTE: Well why can't you just make up your mind and stick to it?

9. HELEN: Look, I'm sure if you move back to your former house, everything will be o.k. That was a lovely house. I always thought it was a beautiful place to live.

10. FACILITATOR: It sounds like both of you (Charlotte and Helen) want to deny Ray's miserable feelings, in favor of a quick solution to the "problem."

11. CHARLOTTE: Well I just don't think she should

Comments

6-8. Here, again, Charlotte is being punishing and not making contact with Ray's pain.

9. Helen was also trying to smooth over the situation --fearful perhaps, that Ray would let her emotions go completely and that she would give up.

10-12. The Facilitator felt that perhaps Charlotte was projecting feelings of self pity on to Ray.
feel so sorry for herself.

12. FACILITATOR: What makes you so uncomfortable with these feelings?

13. CHARLOTTE: I'm not uncomfortable with that--I just want to see her say something and stick to it.

This interaction was typical of many that transpired while Ray, Charlotte, Vivian and Helen comprised the group.

The Facilitator felt confused and ineffectual in the face of this resistance and criticism.

At the beginning of the next meeting the Facilitator attempted to bring her feelings out in the group.

14. FACILITATOR: I'm feeling pretty down about what seems to be happening here. None of you seems to want to be a warm caring person to someone who's experiencing a lot of pain. I'm feeling helpless and somewhat disappointed with the way the group is going. I realize this is a heavy thing for a leader to lay

13. This was a move to push the discussion away from herself. This was a frequent maneuver on her part.

14-15. The Facilitator was feeling it was worth risking bringing this out--since she was not disguising her feelings. This was an example of genuineness on the part of the Facilitator (Carkhuff, 1967).
on a group and it sounds like you're not behaving like I want you to—but I have to do something to get past this impasse.

15. HELEN: I'm glad you said something, because I've been aware of your dissatisfaction.

16. CHARLOTTE: It sounds like you don't like it when I express my real feelings.

17. VIVIAN: I agree with you, Shirley. I feel there is too much criticism and not enough warm feelings. It sounds like you three are always measuring and competing with one another. You take turns being critical mothers and rebellious daughters.

18. FACILITATOR: (Attempting to uncover some possible distortions) How many here feel that women can really help each other and themselves?

19. HELEN: I'm glad you asked that because I think that's part of the problem here. We can't trust each other.

20. CHARLOTTE: I think I trust all of you—but you don't like me to express how I really feel.

21. RAY: I'd like to talk to the group about...
something. I've lost my job and I don't know what I'm going to do. Besides that I have to move and I have no place to move. I lost that other house because I waited so long and I have to vacate the one I'm in.

22. FACILITATOR: You really must be experiencing a lot of pain.

23. HELEN: We're here and we care about you. You're not all alone.

24. FACILITATOR: I'm feeling very warm toward each of you. I'd like to stand in a circle—very close—with our arms around each other.

After we parted the following conversation ensued.

25. HELEN: I feel so good.

26. RAY: I want to thank you all.

27. VIVIAN: I felt

Comments

22-23. Helen is trying to behave as a healing person towards Ray (Rogers, 1970). Ray continues to cry. Facilitator walks over to her and hugs her. Ray expresses joy through her tears, and proceeds to hug each person in turn.

24. The Facilitator felt the need for a warm basic encounter (Rogers, 1970). This could also be experienced as a corrective experience in the lives of these women.

25-28. The Facilitator hoped that a reduction of defensiveness would result.
funny at first because I'm not used to hugging women, but now I feel good.

28. CHARLOTTE: I liked that.

The next weekly session the group was back again to the same critical, judgemental behavior.

The Facilitator experienced a helpless and hopeless feeling which she shared with the group.

Following this the Facilitator told the group about her new job and a class that would meet four nights a week starting week after next.

Comments

29. HELEN: I guess you'll give up the group then. I guess you won't feel too bad about doing it.

30. FACILITATOR: You're right, I won't be able to continue the group on this schedule, but I have mixed feelings about breaking it up. Why don't we spend our next week's session discussing our feelings about the ending of the group.

29-30. The Facilitator hoped that they might bring out some of their negative feelings about what was happening. She also felt guilty at letting the group down and dissatisfied with her own inability to "develop a psychological climate of safety in which freedom of expression and reduction of defensiveness may occur" (Rogers, 1970).
In the following final session everyone expressed regret that the group was ending. The Facilitator informed them of other groups they might join. Charlotte said she would look for a livelier group where they wouldn't jump on her for being herself and talking loud.

The Facilitator shared her feelings of regret and guilt at not being able to continue the group, and how painful good-byes are. We all agreed on that.

The preceding outlined a group situation where the impact of the leader was limited as to the changes she could effect in the group. This was, during the latter period, not a helping group.
CONCLUSIONS

In this section I will attempt to evaluate and state some results and opinions based on this group experience. Since this is, in part a self evaluation, I will use the first person form.

The basic real problem of individuals in this and other groups seems, to me, to be the identity crisis. The presenting problem may be a marital problem, a problem on the job or with children, but when the defenses are lessened it usually becomes an individual's search for who he or she is and what he/she wants from life.

This seems to fit in with the purpose of groups, according to Carkhuff. Carkhuff states that the ultimate hope for a client is that the therapeutic effort will enable him "to become more congruent, understanding, and respectful of himself" (Carkhuff, 1967).

In addition, my purpose is to help people become aware of and develop their own values—as contrasted to those that are imposed by others. A person should strive to develop a feeling that he/she is in charge of his/her life and is ready to accept the responsibilities that accrue based on an awareness of his/her own decision making process. People (especially women who feel they need to be loved by others to feel worthwhile) mistakenly feel
that if someone knows them as they really are they will not like them. They feel that to get someone to like them they must please them in every way. This is a distortion that can destroy one's desire and ability to find his/her own center.

The group's purpose seemed nebulous at first, but according to my system of values some people made great changes. For example, Joan's remarkable change from a frightened, paralyzed, helpless woman to an assertive, communicative, aware individual was undeniable. It resulted from the development of group rapport, support, intimacy and caring. Joan was a warm and caring group participant and others responded in kind. However, there was also an element of directness and honesty as when Teresa questioned Joan about the safety of her children and herself in the home with her husband. Joan was open to new ideas, and really concerned about the course her life was taking.

Rogers' description of what happens in most groups happened in this group, at least for the first six months. There was a psychological climate of safety so that defensiveness was reduced. People were able to express immediate feeling reactions toward each other. Mutual trust and self acceptance developed. And, finally, people lost their defensive rigidity and change was experienced as a positive experience.
Vivian was another person who benefitted from the group. She was greatly troubled, mistrustful and confused when she came to the group, and through the sharing of her secret fears and feelings, she became more trusting, more adventurous and more flexible. When at a later date Vivian lost her job, even though there was a great feeling of anxiety she felt she would come through the experience unbroken.

There is another facet of learning that the group discussed, and that was the need to accept the negative feelings along with the positive feelings. If we are able to feel love, caring, warmth, joy, we will also be open to fear, hate, anger, and anxiety. The negative feelings are part of the human experience, and the price we pay for repressing them is the diminishing of all feelings. I think everyone in the group realized the universality of negative feelings, and in a common bond with others felt less guilty about their existence in themselves.

Of course, some group members did not change, such as Eleanor, Charlotte and Ray. One of the things I learned about myself as a Facilitator is that I am not omnipotent nor do I want to be. Although I experienced disappointment in the above instances, I feel I learned that my basic philosophy is that people do and should make their own decisions. I must accept this in others
as I hope they will accept me as a total individual.

To take a further step in evaluation, I would like to look at several of Carkhuff's optimum qualities in a counselor and make a personal, subjective evaluation.

I feel that I develop empathy for individual group members as the relationship develops. I do not try to psych out or analyze a person; I let it just evolve. Perhaps this was a failing in the case of Charlotte. If I had discovered her pattern more quickly, my leadership might have proved more effective. In the area of respect, I feel that I require respect for myself and I do give it to the group members. As for genuineness, except where I am experiencing conflicting feelings (and even then I try to express it), I feel that I am basically genuine and congruent. I try to be myself and express these feelings and values to the group. I am also concerned with the concreteness of ideas. I try to facilitate the use of specific examples when people or myself are expressing a thought or a feeling. It helps me to understand the thinking process when I hear an incident described with specificity. Concreteness also helps people stay with the specific problem.

Due to this group experience I have become aware of certain areas of weakness in myself, as a facilitator. One is that I have a tendency at times to be indecisive and let things flow until they are out of hand, as
happened in Charlotte's case. I also find that I'm sometimes over protective of the group members, and I find it difficult to decide whom to protect first when a conflict arises between the group members.

I have also made some changes in my thinking regarding group structure based on this group. I will, in the future: (1) set a time limit for the group's life cycle; (2) not allow new people to enter the group too long after the group's initial formation; (3) interview each prospective member to see if he/she would fit into this particular group; (4) feel free to ask someone to leave if he/she were being destructive—to the group or to himself/herself; and (5) not allow more than two people in the group that were friends on the outside.

There is, of course, always the danger that a group will become toxic and lead to either no change or destructive changes in the group members. This is what I feel occurred in the last two months of this group's life cycle. Further, people may be adversely affected to the degree that they will seek psychiatric help. This may be a mixed blessing since it may lead ultimately to mental health.

In general, I have very positive feelings about myself and the other people in the group. I am looking forward to my next experience as a Facilitator, hoping to put into practice some of my new insights.
I have attempted to evaluate the development of this group in relation to my purpose and philosophy, my effectiveness as a facilitator, specific successes and failures based on my stated goals and finally the changes I would include in subsequent groups. It was a worthwhile experience.
REFERENCES


