

# Improving Treatment Outcomes in Groups: A Deep Dive into Therapeutic Factors



Dave Reyher  
MSW, CAADC  
Alvernia University

## Why Use Groups?

- More **cost effective**
- More **time effective**
- More **clinically effective**

**What  
Makes  
Groups  
More  
Clinically  
Effective?**

- 1. Yalom's Therapeutic Factors**
- 2. Communication Patterns**
- 3. Group Dynamics**
- 4. Content, Process & Context**
- 5. Stages of Group Development**

## Yalom's Therapeutic Factors in Groups

- Psychiatrist and researcher **Irvin Yalom** identified eleven therapeutic factors in groups in his 1970 book, "*The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*".
- These are beneficial elements which emerge during group activities.
- Today we recognize that there are *additional* therapeutic factors in groups.

# Irvin Yalom's Therapeutic Factors in Groups

FACTOR		DEFINITION
1	<b>Universality</b>	Members recognize that others share similar feelings, thoughts and problems and no longer feel alone or unique.
2	<b>Instillation of Hope</b>	Members observe other's successes and develop trust in the group and optimism for their own improvement.
3	<b>Altruism</b>	Members gain a boost to self-esteem through the act of giving and extending help to others.
4	<b>Imparting information</b>	Members receive useful information or suggestions provided by the leader or others.

# Irvin Yalom's Therapeutic Factors in Groups

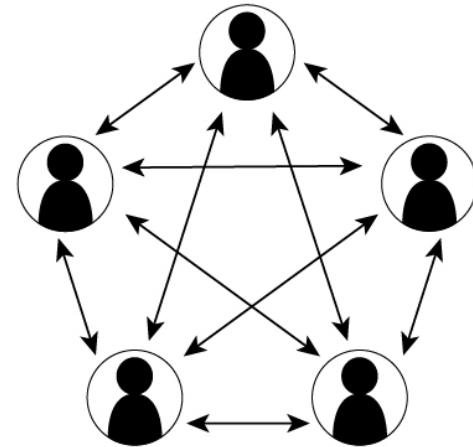
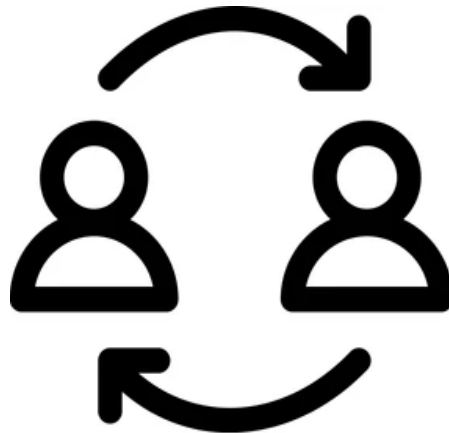
FACTOR		DEFINITION
5	<b>Corrective Reenactment</b>	Members have an opportunity to reenact critical interpersonal dynamics with others in a corrective, more adaptive manner.
6	<b>Socializing Skills</b>	Members learn and practice healthier social skills and effective communication skills.
7	<b>Imitative Behavior</b>	Members develop and improve knowledge and skills through by observing and modeling the leader and other's work.
8	<b>Group Cohesiveness</b>	Members experience feelings of acceptance, trust and belonging with others and develop a sense of "we"-ness as a group.

# Irvin Yalom's Therapeutic Factors in Groups

FACTOR		DEFINITION
9	<b>Existential Factors</b>	Members consider life questions, learn to accept personal responsibility for life decisions, and to find personal meaning as part of group.
10	<b>Catharsis</b>	Members can express and release strong feelings about past or present experiences in a supportive environment.
11	<b>Interpersonal Learning</b>	Members gain insight about themselves and their interactions . The group provides a "social microcosm" to practice interacting adaptively.

## Communication Patterns

- Communication patterns between **individuals** involves a straightforward one-to-one reciprocal exchange.



- Communication patterns in **groups** involves a complex exchange between multiple people on multiple levels.

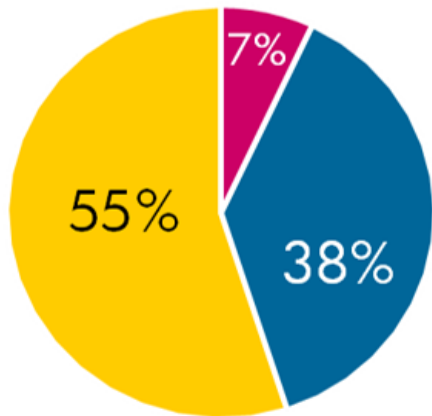
## The Power of Communication

- **Communication** is the lifeblood of a group.
- **Communication** is one of the most influential factors that shapes how a group functions, develops cohesion, makes decisions, and resolves conflicts.
- Without effective **communication**, a group cannot reach its collective goals.

## Communication as a Therapeutic Factor

- Groups allow for immediate and diverse **feedback** from other members.
- Groups allow for appropriate **challenge** and **confrontation** by other members.
- Groups allow members to **practice** communication and social skills in a safe, supportive environment.

# Parts of Communication



**55% body language**

**38% voice tone**

**7% spoken words**

Source: Albert Mehrabian, 1971

All **Communication** consists of 3 basic parts:

1. **Verbal:** spoken words

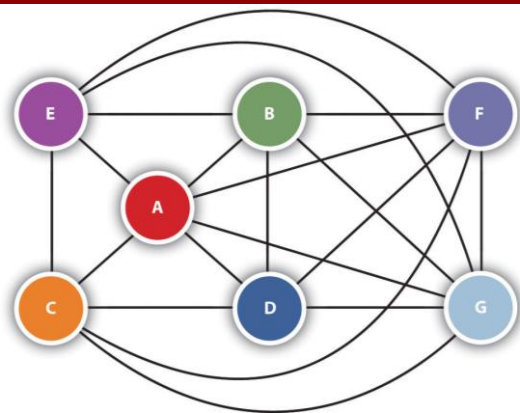
2. **Non-Verbal ("not words")**

**2-A. Body Language:** behaviors, gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, posture...

**2-B. Voice Tone:** volume, inflection...

# Group Dynamics

- **Group dynamics** refers to a system of interactions, behaviors and psychological processes that occur in groups.
- How people act when they are in groups
- How groups influence individuals, and how individuals influence groups



## Group Dynamics as a Therapeutic Factor

- Groups act as a **social microcosm** as members' patterns of relating and behaving within the group mirror their interpersonal struggles and tendencies in their everyday lives.
- Group members learn new ways of interacting which they can then apply to their broader relationships.
- Members learn to relate to others, observing how their own actions affect the group and how the actions of others impact them.

## The Power of Groups: Conformity

- **Groups** exert a *significant influence* on an individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviors.
- **Conformity** is following or obeying the rules, beliefs or actions of others in response to expectations or pressure of a **group**.
- People **conform** for acceptance and avoid rejection, to fit in, to avoid punishment, and to be seen as being right or avoid being wrong.
- **Very few** people actually resist conforming to a group in real-life situations.

# CONFORMITY SELF-SURVEY

Think about a group that you belong to that is **important** to you in some way(s), and take the following self-survey

1. I would **NOT** do something that goes against my values and beliefs as part of the group no matter what. I would resist the group.
2. I **MAY** do something that goes against my values and beliefs as part of the group depending on the situation but would voice my concerns and definitely "*draw the line*" at a certain point and not go any further.
3. I would **PROBABLY** do something that goes against my values and beliefs as part of the group to avoid rejection or consequences but may "*draw the line*" at a certain point and not go any further.
4. I would **DEFINITELY** do something that goes against my values and beliefs as part of a group to avoid rejection or consequences.

# Examples of Conformity

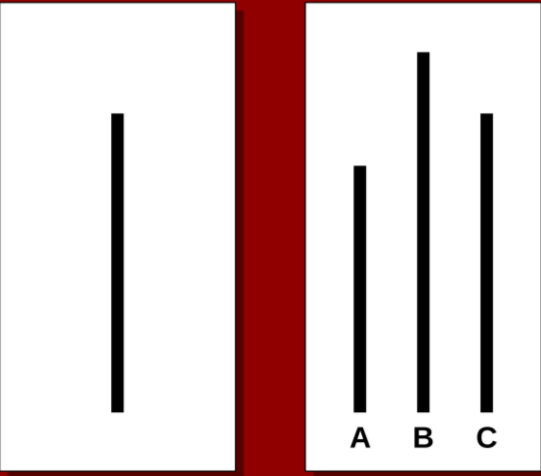
## **HISTORY:**

- The Holocaust
- Salem Witch Trials
- Japanese Internment Camps
- Jonestown Massacre
- Currently?

## **RESEARCH STUDIES:**

- Arthur Jennes (1932): Bean Experiment
- Solomon Asch (1951): Line Length Experiment
- Stanley Milgram (1960's): Shock Experiment
- Stanford University (1971): Prison Experiment

# Asch Line Experiment



- Participants were placed in a small group where most other "participants" were plants as part of the experiment
- Participants were shown a card with a single line, and another card with three comparison lines, and asked to identify which comparison line matched the single line.
- In some groups the fake participants deliberately gave the wrong answer.
- In these groups up to 75% of real participants also gave the obviously wrong answer despite knowing it was incorrect.

# Milgram Shock Experiment

- Participants were led to believe they were shocking learners in another room with high-voltage electric shocks when the learner incorrectly answered questions.
- The learner was really an actor who would respond to the fake “shocks” with loud complaints and screams.
- The experimenter commanded participants to continue “shocking” learners with higher voltages, even if the learner protested and the “shocks” reached dangerous or deadly levels.
- **65%** (26 out of 40) of participants followed orders to administer the maximum electric shock of 450 volts and **100%** of participants obeyed up to 300 volts, even when it went against their personal beliefs.



# Conformity as a Therapeutic Factor

- **Conformity** can be a powerful therapeutic factor when the natural tendency to align with group norms is channeled into positive behavioral changes and growth.
- Healthy group norms allow members to experience several of Yalom's therapeutic factors through **conformity**:
  - Cohesiveness and belonging
  - Development of socializing skills
  - Interpersonal learning
  - Imitative behavior
  - Instillation of hope
  - Universality

## Content, Process & Context

All groups operate on **3 levels** simultaneously and every group session involves these 3 elements working together:



# Content

- **Content** is “**what**” is currently being said and topics discussed in the group.
- Explicit **verbal** communications.
- Typically related to the main purpose or reason for the group session.



# Process

- Process is “**how**” group members interact with and react to each other and the leader.
- “**How**” things work and are dealt with in the group both formally and informally.
- Implicit or unspoken **nonverbal** communications and actions
- Reveals the underlying *meaning* behind the content.



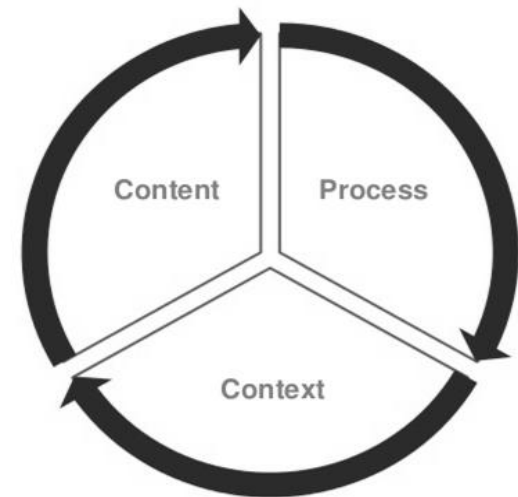
# Context

- **Context** involves the “**why**” of situations and circumstances that take place within the group. (as well as “where” and “who”)
- **Context** is the unique environment of each particular group session within which the two other activities take place
- **Context** provides important insights into personal motives and motivations, unresolved issues and conflicts, and interpersonal difficulties.



## Process and Content in Context

- Content (“what”) and process (“how”) all take place *simultaneously* within the context (“why”) of each group session
- These three elements should be the primary focus of group sessions, NOT the scheduled “agenda”.
- Allowing agendas or schedules to determine whether and to what extent to address important issues of **content**, **process** and **context** overlooks prime opportunities for therapeutic progress.



# Stages of Group Development (Tuckman, 1965, 1977)

All groups go through certain **stages of development** and each stage has certain central concerns that must be addressed.

- 1. Forming Stage:** Uncertainty, Safety, (Mis)Trust, Inclusion
- 2. Storming Stage:** Disagreement, Conflict, Resistance, Power Struggles
- 3. Norming Stage:** Conflict Resolution, Acceptance, Cooperation, Norms
- 4. Performing Stage:** Cohesiveness, Respect Support, Challenge, Action
- 5. Adjourning Stage:** Separation, Translation, Celebration, Closure



# The Stages of Change

- The **Stages of Change** describe a common process all people use to change behaviors.
- Counselors need to know what **stage** an individual or a group is in regarding an issue to choose effective strategies.



1. **Precontemplation**: No plans to change
  2. **Contemplation**: Thinking about change
  3. **Preparation**: Preparing for change
  4. **Action**: Taking steps to change
  5. **Maintenance**: Sustaining change
- ❖ **Relapse**: not required, but not uncommon

Meet People  
Where They  
Are, Not  
Where You  
would Like  
Them to Be.

- Every time you meet and interact with a group, you are “***meeting them where they are***” individually and collectively, NOT where you want them to be.
- Remember to assess and evaluate “***where they are***” regarding the stage of the group and the members’ stages of change at that point of time.
- You need to know “***where they are***” in order to select effective strategies, interventions and activities to enhance and facilitate therapeutic change.

“The right thing  
at the wrong time  
is the wrong thing.”

- Joshua Harris

## Synergy of Therapeutic Factors

- **Synergy** refers to a combined effect of two or more things interacting that is greater than the sum of their individual effects.
- The combination of multiple **therapeutic factors** in groups creates a **synergistic** effect, leading to significant clinical improvements that exceed the effect of individual factors.
- The greater the number of **therapeutic factors** present in the group, the better the overall results.

## Tying It All Together

Groups offer many therapeutic benefits which work better together:

- **Communication Patterns**
- **Dynamics/ Conformity**
- **Content/Process/Context**
- **Therapeutic Factors**
- **Stages of Development**

