

# Group, Family, & Couples Therapies

- Group Therapy Overview
- Encounter groups
- Psychodynamic group therapy
- Family Therapy
- Couples therapy

**Professor Fazakas-DeHoog**

**lfazakas@uwo.ca**

# Group Therapies

- **CHARACTERISTICS**
- Closed vs. Open
- Short-term vs. Ongoing
- Professionally led vs. peer support
- Group therapy vs. support group

# Group Therapies

- Support groups
- Education/specific tx groups
- Psychoanalytic
- Gestalt
- Behavior Therapy
  - Assertiveness

# Groups

## GESTALT

- Traditional T-groups
- Encounter
- Sensory awareness
- Marathon (6-48)
- Encounter tapes

## PSYCHOANALYTICALLY ORIENTED

- Transactional analytic
- Psychodrama

# Encounter Groups

- Aka personal growth, T-groups, human potential groups etc.
- Popularized in 1960's
- 8-20 members
- Short (hours or days)
- Value interpersonal honesty, exploration, confrontation, emotional expression, and self-disclosure
- Goals often vague: some type of experience (e.g., joy) or specific change

# Leader variables

(Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles, 1973)

- Largely predicted success
- Emotional activation of clients\*\*
- Executive function\*\*
- Caring\*
- Meaning attribution\*

# Cons

- Technology lacks reliability and privacy protection
- Inaccurate messages
- Stories or people may be fictionalized
- Limited emotional cues (no nonverbals)
- Lack of support if mbr. hurt or offended
- Ethical concerns for professionals

# Important Considerations

- Number of members
- Groups norms
- Role of leader
- Group cohesion (homogeneous?)
- Exclusionary criterion

# Exclusion criteria

## Exclusion criteria for dynamic group psychotherapy (Dies, 1993)

- Patients in acute crisis
- A history of broken attendance in therapy
- Major problems of self-disclosure
- Difficulties with intimacy generalized into personal distrust
- Patients who refuse
- Defenses that use denial excessively
- Impulsive behavior patterns

# Interpersonal Group Therapy (Yalom)

## **Goals:**

- Provide clients with a corrective emotional experience
- Group members collectively encouraged to allow adult thoughts & feelings to modify earlier traumatic experiences.
- Interpersonal learning

## **Therapist Role:**

- Minimize impact of transference tensions
- Encourage connections made between past & present and between behaviors in & outside of the group.
- Interpretations less important

# Interpersonal Group Therapy

## Overall curative aspects (Yalom)

- Group cohesiveness
- Instilling hope
- Universality
- Altruism
- Interpersonal learning
- Imitative behavior
- Corrective re-processing of primary family
- Catharsis
- Education / Imparting information
- Self understanding

# The Tavistock Model (Bion, 1961)

## Group operates at 2 levels:

1. **“Work group”** – attempting to meet complete group tasks in an orderly way.
2. **“Basic Assumptions Group”** (i.e. primitive defense responses to anxiety generated by being in a group)
  - **Dependency** – someone else (usually group leader) has the power, ability, knowledge to satisfy their needs
  - **Fight or Flight** – behave as if some external threat.
  - **Pairing** – 2 members long intense discussions

## Analyst's function

- Interpret group phenomenon (group projections)
- Analyst (opaque) – “”outside of the group” not interacting with individual members.

# Effectiveness of Group Therapy

- IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS
- Patient selection – presenting problem, personality, primary defense mechanisms.
- Group cohesion
  
- Research with SOS Groups.
- Participants indicate that:
- Universality
- Support of leader & members most important

# Group Analysis Model (Foulkes, 1948)

## **Group Function**

- **Primary impulse is to communicate**
- **Location-** individual internalizes the forces operating in the group to which he/she belongs
- **Matrix-** group is a complex unconscious network of interactions between individuals, subgroups, and the whole group.
- **Attachment – belonging in the matrix ( = secure attachment base)**

## **Leader's function**

- Holding and containing function
- Points out conflict & enhances group communication
- Interpretations of individual & group phenomenon
- Explore transference relationships ( > awareness)

# Systemic Approach to Family Therapy

- Most family therapists presuppose an average level of intelligence and education on the part of adult members of the family.
- **Exclusionary Criterion:**
- families in which one, or both, of the parents is psychotic or has been diagnosed with antisocial or paranoid personality disorder,
- families whose cultural or religious values are opposed to, or suspicious of, psychotherapy,
- families with members who cannot participate in treatment sessions because of physical illness or similar limitations,
- families with members with very rigid personality structures. families whose members cannot or will not be able to meet regularly for treatment,
- families that are unstable or on the verge of breakup.

# Systemic Approach to Family Therapy

- Usually short term
- **The identified patient**
  - family blames one individual for family problems
- **Homeostasis (balance)**
  - System attempts to maintain homeostasis & resists change
- **The extended family field**
  - nuclear & extended family
- **Differentiation**
  - maintain individual identity & attachment to family unit
- **Triangular relationships**
  - **Two family members align against one other**

# Communication based family therapy

- Assumptions
  - All behaviour is communication
  - Family rules maintain homeostasis
- Maladaptive behaviour
  - Symptoms are both cause and effect of communication
  - E.g., double bind, mind-reading, blaming

# Effectiveness of Family Therapy

- Relatively few empirical studies
- Behavioral/Psychoeducational & Eclectic more effective than humanistic or systemic approaches
- Family approach more effective than individual for:
- Relapse prevention in schizophrenia

# Examples of Couples Therapy

- Behavioral Marital Therapy (BMT)
  - Contingency contracting
  - Support-understanding techniques
  - Problem-solving

# Emotion Focused Couples Therapy

## Emotion Focused Couples Therapy

- Uncover, acknowledge & express denied emotions (not just catharsis, but awareness)
- Therapy as a corrective emotional experience
- Improve attachment security
- Systems theory – the combination of 2 individuals creates a whole (relationship) that is the sum of the partners.
- Especially useful for:
  - high negative emotional engagement
  - lower sense of emotional engagement or time together in the couple
  - low sexual affection

# Emotion Focused Couples Therapy

## **Effectiveness of EFCT (Cloutier, 2002)**

- 62% improved at end of treatment
- 77% improved at 2 year followup
- 7% divorced (v. 32% in non-treatment control)

### **Clients report important changes include:**

- one partner expressed underlying feelings, and the other changing their perceptions of the partner after hearing this
- learning to understand underlying emotions
- learning to productively express emotional needs
- taking responsibility for emotional needs,
- receiving validation for one's needs

# Solution Focused Couples Therapy

- Brief
- Positively focused (i.e. focus on successes rather than failures)
- Enhance expectations for change
- Small manageable goals

## PROCESS:

- Normalizing
- Restructuring
- Affirmation (of strengths & past successes)
- Bridging
- Homework
- The “Miracle Question”

# Solution Focused Couples Therapy

- **THE MIRACLE QUESTION**
- After thinking about your relationship, please take a few moments to answer the following questions:
- Suppose one night, while you were asleep, there was a miracle and your relationship issues were resolved. When you woke up:
  - • how would you know a miracle had occurred?
  - • what sorts of things would be different?
  - • how would **you be thinking** differently?
  - • what would **you be doing** differently?
  - • how would your family/friends know that a miracle had occurred?

# Effectiveness of Solution Focused Couples Therapy

- **(Reimer & Chatwin, 2006)**
- With affective problems:
  - 61% effective
- Non-affective problems:
  - 76% effective
- (Colley, 2003)
- With childrearing issues
  - (e.g. ODD): 90% effective

# Predicting Divorce

- Four horsemen
  - Criticism
  - Contempt
  - Defensiveness
  - Stonewalling
- Failed repair attempts
- Bad memories

# Magic five hours

- Partings
  - 2 min/day X 5 work days = 10 min
- Reunions
  - 20 min/day X 5 = 1 hr 40 min
- Admiration & appreciation
  - 5 min/day X 7 days = 35 min
- Affection
  - 5 min/day X 7 days = 35 min
- Weekly date
  - 2 hr/we

# Effectiveness of Couples Therapy

- Not frequently studied
- More effective than family therapy
- BMT and EFT both effective
- CBT appears promising