



Understanding Group Dynamics and Systems

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What is going on? Meghan has been so open and responsive in the past but now she seems shut down. Folded arms. She hasn't said a word today. Should I say something to her or would that just push her deeper into withdrawal? Wait a minute. I'm missing something. Dana is staring at her, frowning. So is Chet. Something going on between them. It seems like Meghan's quietness is reflecting some hesitance on the part of others, almost as if she is "speaking" for them. If so, I'd be better off not focusing on Meghan but instead encouraging others to draw her out.

In this chapter, you learn to think in new ways about human behavior, attending not only to the individual but also to the larger systemic and interactive dynamics between people. Working in groups requires a whole different set of perceptual filters by which to make sense of what is going on. Rather than focusing on one person, you must be aware of multiple people, various interactions, and all the process events happening in-between, just as illustrated in the reflections of the group leader above. It is enough to make your head spin.

If all you did as a group leader was constantly follow the main speaker or interaction, group sessions would be rather tiring, and potentially boring. Worse yet is that you would also be missing out on all the potential collective energy and interactions that group work can offer. Even though you use many of your individual therapeutic skills, they are applied quite differently. It is for this

reason that experienced group leaders leave linear thinking behind and learn to think recursively (circular) and systemically. This means learning to look at the bigger picture of how each person's actions fit within a larger context of his or her world, as well as that of the group. You will not only diagnose individual difficulties but also assess interpersonal patterns, group stages, systemic functioning, coalitional alliances, and other dynamics that are important to understand. In a sense, effective group leaders learn to see the forest and the trees.

Many of the models and theories about group are focused on interpersonal interaction and are drawn from interpersonal theory, social psychology, and research on collective behavior. The interpersonal focus is useful since it draws attention not only to exchanges and behavior in the present but also from the past. The focus on systems allows group leaders to expand their vision of a group and see how it evolves over time. Furthermore, it brings attention to the communication patterns and interpersonal patterns that emerge. Essentially, it deepens the understanding of group dynamics and reminds group leaders that group work is not individual counseling in a group setting, but rather group counseling in a systemic setting (Connors & Caple, 2005).

Linear and Circular Causality

The strange thing about leading groups is that you are attending not only to group members as individuals but also to the interactive effects of how each person's behavior influences, and is in turn affected by, everyone else's actions. Look at your own classroom as one example. The instructor does and says things that have a huge impact on what happens in the room. It would appear as if you and your classmates react in a linear way to the stimulus of a statement such as "Okay, count off by fives and organize yourselves into small groups." Some students look annoyed, and others seem bored. Others eagerly agree, excited that they do not have to sit quietly for the period and hear a lecture. You might feel both apprehensive and interested about what is about to occur next.

According to one model, favored by traditional behavioral theorists over the years, human reactions occur either as a stimulus-response, *classical conditioning* (à la Ivan Pavlov) process or as a response-stimulus, *operant* (à la B. F. Skinner) mode. In the former, the instructor's directions elicit an automatic response in class members that has been conditioned over time; in the latter case, a particular response—the instructor's observation that the energy level is low in the room—is conditioned by a stimulus designed to alter current conditions. In both examples, behavior is viewed as linear in nature: One action affects the other in a direct line.

Even contemporary behaviorists now see this as a gross simplification of what happens during complex human interactions (Spiegler & Guevremont, 2003). There are not only internal, cognitive, and affective processes going on within each person that influence how the world is perceived, but behavior in groups follows a much more circular rather than a linear path. In circular causality, group members' behavior is simultaneously moving in all directions at once, "a continuous series of circular loops or recurring chains of influence" (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2007, p. 16). In a sense, this speaks to different forces moving in multiple directions—not influenced by one action but rather by ongoing mutually influencing processes. Building on the example above, the instructor asking the class to break into small groups is really just one of many processes happening at that moment.

For a Class Activity

In groups of three, identify one critical incident or dramatic moment that recently occurred in class in which many people were affected by what transpired. Go back and try to re-create what might have led up to the culminating event as well as its aftermath. Rather than relying on *linear causality*, employ a model of *circular causality* (reciprocal influences, causes, and effects) in which you examine how each person's behavior was both a trigger and an effect on others' actions.

As one example, linear causality might lead one to say that a student asked a "dumb" question at the end of class, eliciting groans from classmates, frustration in the instructor, and then shame and regret in that student for opening his mouth. If you look at that same incident from a circular perspective, you identify that many more complex processes were occurring. The student asked the question in the first place because he read a look in the instructor's eye that seemed to invite such an inquiry. The instructor was actually trying to encourage more student participation because he interpreted that this particular student was bored when he was really confused, and so the student checked out for a while. The groans from the class may have to do with some students wanting to leave early, another being annoyed by the question, and yet another who is not even paying attention in class but is rather looking at his iPhone and just saw that his favorite team lost. Once you bring in the contributory influences and effects of others in the room, you have quite a complex situation, far more so than you ever imagined.

Whether in trying to make sense of what is going on in a classroom or what started a fight among a group of people, it is virtually impossible to identify who caused what. All group behavior occurs within a context that includes the individual's perception of reality, as well as the interactions taking place, both consciously and unconsciously, between all people present.

Systems Theory

The concept of circular causality is only one of many ideas spawned from what has become known as “systems theory.” Developed by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), this approach to understanding behavior was designed to make sense of the way that all living creatures organize themselves and act in predictable patterns. Furthermore, he was instrumental in getting others to consider the whole as greater than the sum of its parts, which is called *holism*. Being a biologist, and also fond of physics metaphors, many of the terms he introduced to describe the way groups of people behave sound more appropriate for a science class: *homeostasis*, *morphogenesis*, and *feedback loops*.

Until group leaders had a framework in which to look at systemic behavior, that is, the interactive patterns and subsystems of a group, there was a tendency to treat group work like doing individual counseling or therapy, but with an audience present. There are still some group structures that operate that way, just as there are some group leaders who are essentially doing individual therapy in a group setting with witnesses. Obviously, this does not capitalize on many of the powerful therapeutic ingredients that are present in a community healing environment.

In the helping professions, the family therapy movement (figures such as Murray Bowen, Jay Haley, Virginia Satir, to mention a few) has been instrumental in introducing systemic thinking as a means by which to assess the ways that groups of relatives organize themselves over time, creating stable patterns (homeostasis) that are inclined to return to familiar states (equilibrium). In this sense, one of the beliefs is that systems tend to be self-correcting based on feedback, either positive or negative, and that systems maintain stability.

For Personal Application

Think of a time in your family when someone created a problem or conflict to “help” everyone else resume a familiar, stable pattern. For instance, your parents were having a disagreement and you or your siblings distracted them by acting out. Consider the ways that your family of origin organized itself consistently into the same, familiar ordered system. Whenever things became destabilized or chaotic, what roles did you and others play to bring things back to equilibrium?

Most family therapists, who are also group specialists, favor a whole glossary of terms that are used to describe the way family systems tend to operate. Many of these ideas are quite useful in understanding behavior in all groups, not just

family systems. As an example of this, imagine that a group member claims that another participant hurt him deeply by confronting him about his tendency to ramble. The confronting group member defends herself by saying that the rambler drives her crazy with his tendency to talk all the time. Each believes that the other is causing them to act the way they did (e.g., $A \rightarrow B$, or $B \rightarrow A$), even though each is actually both the cause and the effect of the other's behavior (e.g., $A \leftrightarrow B$). We simplified this interaction considerably, of course. Remember that they are both part of a larger group in which there are also other members covertly involved in this interaction, rooting for one person or the other depending on their loyalties.

Group coalitions, or subsystems, are also important phenomena to observe and identify. All groups organize themselves into smaller units, each with its own set of rules or norms that regulate behavior (remember that homeostasis is the key in this model). Each of these smaller coalitional groups has certain boundaries between them that control who can say what to whom. In a family, this phenomenon might be readily observed as a father-mother subsystem; another between two of the three siblings; and another composed of the mother, her mother, and the third child. In a group, you might see this when there is a popular and powerful group—a couple members who have become close compared with those who are shy and not too confident. You can therefore appreciate that these coalitions are organized around mutual needs, loyalties, and control of power. When these subsystems are dysfunctional and destructive, such as when a parent is aligned with a child against his spouse or a child is in coalition with a grandparent against her parents, the counselor's job is to initiate realignments in the structure and power, creating a new set of subsystems that are more functional.

In groups, as well, you will observe that members will align themselves with allies according to shared values and what is in their best interest. Different group members find ways to stick together. For example, we have seen male group members align together, Muslim or fundamental Christian group members form coalitions, and gay and lesbian group members pull together in a subgroup against other group members that may appear threatening or aligned against them. Of course, people do tend to be drawn to those who are like them, so it is quite normal for these coalitions to form. You will notice this most dramatically when members form a coalition against you as the leader, a common dynamic that can be therapeutic if handled constructively. This recently happened to Matt in a group he was leading.

A group member, Jillian, who was usually active and emotionally available, alluded to a troubling event, but then said, "I don't want to get into it right now." After saying that, she looked directly at me (Matt), and I followed up by asking, "What makes it hard to talk about it right now?"



Photo 3.1 Rather than functioning as a cohesive team, working together for common goals, group members sometimes become competitive toward one another. They vie for attention, compete for leader approval, sabotage one another—as if each is trying to win a race. This dynamic can begin easily enough, apparently as a form of linear causality in which one person’s behavior appears to trigger someone else to respond. Yet each member’s behavior becomes both a cause and an effect, sparking a form of circular causality in which things can spin out of control.

Jillian paused, explained a little bit, and then spent the next 5 minutes revealing the event to the group. She was tearful and sad throughout. When she finished, I noticed that a few group members began to make eyes at me like they were upset. I inquired about this, and three group members talked about how inappropriate I had been by pushing Jillian to talk when she clearly did not want to. These three group members had spent most of the first 4 weeks in group remaining relatively quiet, alluding to some distress in their lives, but always created a boundary from the group by saying that they felt anxious in the room and were not sure if the group was a good fit for

them. They had created a coalition around the issue of remaining hidden since it seemed they all feared revealing their own inner world. They added that they did not feel safe in the group and that I ought to apologize to the group member, Jillian.

I attempted to validate their observations and concerns, and noted that it may have appeared like I was pushing or bullying Jillian to speak. At this point, I asked the three members if they might be willing to explore their reactions with the group, and why they had such a strong reaction (when the other group members did not). Jillian noted that she did not feel pushed to speak but that she often wanted to push these three group members to open up more about their lives. For the rest of the group, we explored hesitancy and safety in the group with these three members and found that by the end of the night, the group had grown closer to these three and they indicated less anxiety.

Not only can you apply family systems ideas to look at the *structure* of a group but also its *patterns of communication*. A number of group theorists (Agazarian, 2004; Connors & Caple, 2005; Donigian & Malnati, 2005; Gantt & Agazarian, 2006) have adapted systems thinking to all group settings in which you can observe and label the characteristic ways that members relate to one another. Group systems theory helps clarify group processes that are occurring and provides interventions to move the group dynamics in more productive directions (Connors & Caple, 2005). In fact, you can step back from any group you are part of and ask yourself a number of questions about the systemic functioning and see many group systems concepts come to life:

- *What roles are various individuals playing in the group?* Who is placating whom? Who has the power in the group? These questions speak to the notion of each group having a control and power structure. This is also indicated by the following questions: How do decisions get made in the group? Who gets time and how is that negotiated among members? Other than the leader's direction, how is it decided who talks and what is discussed?
- *Which coalitions have formed?* Who is aligned with whom? Which alliances have formed temporarily and permanently? Which members are in conflict with one another?
- *Are the boundaries within a group open enough to allow new information to enter the group?* Boundaries can be tight or loose, depending on the needs of the group. An example of boundaries is the admission criteria for a group setting. Who gets into your group? What are the criteria? A 12-step

- open group may have a loose set of criteria whereas an intensive psychotherapy group for depression may have a strict set of entrance criteria.
- *How do members communicate with one another?* Are the lines of communication clear and direct? Where do members direct their attention when they speak?
 - *Do group interactions tend to move in patterns that move toward keeping the system stable?* Repetitive patterns tend to maintain safety and regularity. What norms have developed in the group that regulates behavior? Which rules were established by the leader versus which ones emerged covertly by members? What are the metarules (the rules about rules) in the group?—These are the ones such as “Make sure you don’t say anything about bald people or it will piss the leader off.”
 - *How is information exchanged among group members?* How did people share what they know with one another? Who was excluded or ignored? Which data were accepted and rejected? What critical information was neglected? How was the information synthesized?
 - *Did change in a system occur via the use of positive and negative feedback?* Rather than a value judgment, positive feedback tends to create change, whereas negative feedback tends to support the current system. Conflict can be an example of positive feedback that is change provoking. How are conflicts resolved? Who doesn’t like whom? What are the ways that members try to sabotage or undermine one another or the leader? How do members show their disagreement with what is going on? At the same time, during conflict there will be group members who try to downplay or squash the conflict. This can be viewed as negative or change resistant feedback. So who tries to make things better? Who squelches the conflict? Who tries to create distractions?
 - *What was the holistic outcome of the group?* Rather than group members acting as solitary agents, each is interdependent on one other, meaning that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (von Bertalanffy, 1968). While new group leaders may evaluate a group based on how some of the members did, holism instructs group leaders to ask “How did the group do today?”

This is just a sample of questions that could emerge from systemic thinking applied to groups. So far, we have been looking at group systems as they are contained within a closed unit. Of course, each individual, and each group system, is part of an interconnected series of other, larger systems. An individual’s behavior in a group is influenced not only by what others are doing in that system but also by significant others in the outside world, as well as from the person’s family of origin.

For Personal Application

Pick a group system that you would like to understand better. This could be your own family, a social group, or perhaps the class. Apply the principles introduced in this chapter to analyze the structural and communicational patterns of this system. You might find it helpful to use a sociogram (a tool used by social psychologists and sociologists) to plot out the various subsystems in your group. Use a graphical drawing to display the coalitions, communication patterns, control and power issues, and boundaries in place. You can either make up your own method for plotting and illustrating patterns, consult standard manuals that teach family systems specialists how to diagram structural and communication patterns (see McGoldrick, Gerson, & Petry, 2008; Tomlinson, 2006), or try some Internet-based applications for constructing sociograms (see www.phenotyping.com/sociogram).

In addition to illustrating the group dynamics that you observe, answer the questions listed above to sort out the roles played by various members—who controls power, what the norms (and unstated rules) are, and what your final assessment is about the relative strengths and weaknesses of this group system.

Family of Origin and Interpersonal Issues

One of our major operating assumptions is to assume that the way people act in your group is representative of how they tend to act in any group throughout their lives. Of course, there would be exceptions to this, but generally speaking, people will often re-create the same patterns and behavior in group that have been established as templates from their early years. This means that people will create a social microcosm, an extended reality of what they are used to in their outside world. They will negotiate with others in the group for comfort zones that are familiar. They will engage in the same dysfunctional patterns that get them in trouble elsewhere. And they will respond to people not just as they really are but how they imagine them to be. Simply put, one's interpersonal style and maladaptive patterns that are present in every other facet of life ultimately will appear in group, too. Regardless of attempts to change or hide patterns, each group member's true self will appear. In reality, then, there is really no need to describe one's interpersonal problems or difficulties in life, as they will eventually come to life in the group.

For Personal Application

When we talk about the concept of social microcosm with our students and group members, it often creates some personal anxiety. The premise of this idea is that regardless of your efforts to hide, appear different, or present a different version of

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yourself in group, the true you will ultimately be revealed. That can be scary simply because of the notion that one cannot hide in group. Putting your anxiety aside, what might that mean for you in a group setting? What parts of yourself, either parts of your personality or interpersonal behavior, do you like to hide or keep hidden from people when you first meet them? What are your fears around having these parts of you revealed? How do you think that people respond to these parts of you?

This phenomenon in which people's unresolved issues with members of their original family play themselves out in a group presents some difficult challenges and some wonderful therapeutic opportunities. Under the right circumstances and leadership, the group environment can be used to produce a "corrective emotional experience" (Frank & Ascher, 1951). The premise of the corrective emotional experience is to expose the group member to emotional stimulation that he or she could not handle in the past. However, in a supportive and effective group setting, the group member can work through this experience in a more productive manner, essentially healing the wounds of the past.

Student Voice

The Social Microcosm

In my group's course, I learned about the social microcosm and thought it just seemed like psychobabble. This was a different setting than my work or my family at home. After a few weeks, however, this strange feeling seemed to come over me as I realized that people were saying things to me that was almost verbatim to what I hear at work and at home. People experienced me as defensive and aloof—that was my main piece of feedback from my last evaluation at work! Then some of the female members of the group gave me feedback that I seemed distracted and not fully engaged with them—that is exactly what my wife tells me! After I heard that I said, "Time-out, something freaky is happening here." Then it hit me that maybe the true me was coming through in group, and I really could not hide from it. That actually freaked me out more but after a bit more time that ended up being the insight that helped me the most.

Yalom and Leszcz (2005) provide a thorough overview of the corrective emotional experience in group settings. This sort of critical incident occurs once it is recognized that someone is experiencing a strong emotional reaction to someone or something occurring in the group, often way out of proportion to what would be expected. This is often seen when a group member experiences

strong anger or dislike toward another, when a self-disclosure deepens one's connection with the group, or when one has strong positive affect toward a group member, yet this is experienced as odd or unique since one expected feelings of rejection. For the corrective experience to occur, the group must be safe and supportive enough so that sensitive and risky, interpersonal emotions can be honestly expressed, and there must be enough engagement and honest feedback between group members to permit effective reality testing so that the group members can explore the situation with consensual validation from others. As this occurs, one can gain increased awareness and recognition of entrenched patterns and inappropriateness of some interpersonal feelings and behavior. An individual can also use the group to interact more deeply and honestly to try new behaviors and work through destructive patterns. Such an interaction would look something like this:

Dorothy: When I was your age, I never . . .

Nevin: What is this crap about when you were my age? You were NEVER my age! I'm so sick of hearing old people like you judge me when you don't even . . .

Leader: Hey, Nevin, calm down. I can see you're upset with what Dorothy said but you need . . .

Nevin: You're another one! Always telling me what I need to do. You know what? Y'all can just kiss my ass. I've had just about enough of this.

Monty: Nevin, man, hey, the guy's just trying to help. Tranquillo, buddy. He don't mean nothing. He's just trying to help.

Nevin: Stay out of it. This ain't your business either. This is between me and Dorothy. She's been on my back since this group started.

Leader: Okay, Nevin, let's stop for a minute and look at what's going on.

Nevin: What is the point!

Leader: I know that the two of you have not been getting along since the group began. It may be hard to understand right now, but I believe there is a good chance that you will learn from each other and ultimately be important to each other over the course of this group.

Nevin: What do you mean?

Leader: Even though I know this is uncomfortable for Dorothy and Monty, I can see that your feelings are hurt, too. I think this is important stuff. In all the time we've been together, Nevin, this is the first time you've really spoken from your heart.

Nevin: Damn right! I am pissed off.

Leader: And that is good. And while I applaud your courage to finally say out loud what you've been feeling—including confronting me, too—I can't help but think there's something else going on here as well.

Nevin: Whaddaya mean?

Leader: Anyone want to help Nevin with the question?

You can see how the leader is trying to get other group members involved in sorting out why Nevin reacted so strongly to Dorothy's offer of help and then reacted rather strongly to his friend Monty's support. The leader has a hypothesis that what is going on right now has little to do with the present members but is actually a reenactment of previous interactions that Nevin has experienced with older authority figures. With further exploration and prompting it is discovered that Dorothy reminds Nevin of his fifth-grade teacher, the one who beat him with a set of extra long rosary beads for no reason that he could ever understand. Furthermore, the whole group reminded him of situations he had faced over and over again in his life—a bunch of do-gooder white folks pretending to care but who secretly harbor beliefs that he is not capable and inferior.

It turned out that this interaction was a very familiar one to Nevin, and so he began to unconsciously respond in the same way that he had always responded in the past. He got angry as a way to push people away in an attempt to protect himself. This time, however, after the intervention by the group and the group leader, events unfolded considerably different from that in the past. Once it was recognized what was occurring, the dynamic could be labeled and the alternative responses could be developed.

Reviewing the process that was just described, there will be times when you are sitting in groups and you notice that people seem to be reacting not only to what is actually occurring in the room but also to some perception they have that is more influenced by their past experiences rather than present circumstances. In the psychological literature, this is often called transference, yet psychoanalytic theorist Harry Stack Sullivan called it *parataxic distortion*. This describes the tendency in group not to see others for who they are, but rather to distort them into who they represent or who we expect them to be based on our own past experiences. So this means that we (group members and even the group leaders) often are not relating to others in reality but instead relating to internal ideas and fantasies of what that person represents. For example, a group member with an abusive father may relate to older, male authority figures as if they were his father. You may notice this phenomenon in your own

interactions with authority figures (teachers, supervisors) who remind you of your parents in some way. When you become aware that such a reaction might be occurring, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is this emotional outburst really about?
- What is this person seeing, feeling, and experiencing that I am missing?
- What is it about this person's cultural, ethnic, and gender background that would explain his or her unique experience?
- How does this fit with what else I know about this person?
- To what extent is this person distorting or exaggerating what is going on?
- How are others in the group reacting to what is happening?
- What does my intuition tell me is going on?
- What can I do to help this person become more aware of his or her behavior and find connections to the past?
- Who might this group member represent?
- What are the intrapersonal needs that are trying to be met through the distorted relationship?
- What do I need to do to work this through toward closure in the group?
- What object lessons can be generalized from this single episode to other group members' experiences?

One of the exciting things about a group setting is the chance to discover and work through some of the distortions. Often the best way to address this is to use other group members to test your assumptions. This is often achieved by consensual validation from other group members by comparing one's interpersonal validations with those of others in the group. So if Willie sees Franklin, an older man in the group, as harsh and rejecting (much like Willie experienced his own father), then the group setting allows Willie the chance to see if other group members see and experience Franklin in the same way. When the other group members disagree, then Willie can explore what gets activated intra- and interpersonally with Franklin, and he can gain some insight and potential healing on this issue.

For a Class Activity

Groups are powerful means for solving problems and completing tasks, given the right atmosphere and structure. The type of leadership and members who participate also play a significant role in group productivity.

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This activity has two main goals:

1. To practice the art of compromise and consensus seeking
2. To witness group dynamics in action

The first step involves taking about 10 minutes to make a list of what you consider to be the ideal characteristics of a good group member.

Get together in groups of about eight members. Two of you will serve as observers of group dynamics. Your job is to watch how the group shares information, makes decisions, and works toward consensus. You will take notes on what you observe and then lead a discussion afterward about what transpired, sharing your perceptions as well as eliciting reactions from participants.

All the members of your assigned group must come to an agreement over the best qualities in your team members. You have 20 minutes to identify what you consider to be the 10 most important member attributes. During this process, it would be good to view differences of opinion as helpful rather than harmful in your consensus seeking. Just make sure that you budget your time so you are able to complete the task in the allotted 20 minutes.

Under the leadership of the observers, take another 10 minutes afterward to talk about the dynamics of your groups, especially with regard to (a) how you organized yourselves, (b) how you shared ideas, (c) how you achieved consensus, and (d) what sort of climate emerged.

For Personal Application

Think of a time recently when you were especially puzzled by the way someone reacted in a group or social situation. The person's behavior struck you as so inappropriate or strange that you could not fathom what was going on. You may have felt annoyed, frustrated, or even angry by this incident.

Attempt to review this incident again, but this time leave your own frame of reference and view the incident from the perspective of this person you did not understand. Try to use pure empathy and compassion to get inside the other person's skin and imagine what it must be like to experience the world through this other's senses and background. Take into consideration the person's unique cultural, religious, family, educational, and historical background. As much as you can, try to be this person, seeing the world through his or her eyes.

Of course, you can never really know another's experience, but using your empathic skills, intuition, and some logical hypothesis based on limited information available reconstruct the meaning of this outburst in light of this person's background. Remember, this person likely felt misunderstood, so make sure that you describe this situation the way he or she would.

Now, talk to yourself (or to others) about how you could use this methodology, as a group leader or in your personal life, whenever you confront behavior that appears incomprehensible to you.

Interaction Patterns

In groups you will be observing not just how members speak to one another but also how they behave. This includes their facial expressions, body posture, special positioning, and anything else that provides clues about internal states. It would come as no surprise to you to learn that people do not always say out loud what they are thinking nor do they tell the truth all the time. Sometimes people don't even know what they are feeling inside. During those times when group members know what they want to say, and intend to be utterly honest in their disclosures, they still can't communicate as fully as they would like. With words, much gets lost in the translation.

As a group leader, you will not only be listening very closely to what participants say, but you will also be observing very carefully how they are behaving. Listen inside the mind of a group leader during a typical moment in a session when she is processing the interaction patterns she observes:

Cynthia is saying that she is upset by what happened in her life this week, but she looks like she is almost proud of the attention she is getting. And notice the way her eyes keep flitting over toward Kevin, as if she is looking for his sympathy. But he is ignoring her, turning his body toward Carlos: I wonder if they know some secret about Cynthia?

Trina, over there, on the other side, is not even listening to Cynthia; she seems to have something else on her mind altogether. It looks to me like she is waiting for a pause so that she can say something. That certainly isn't the case with Mai today. Look, she has her chair pulled back, as if she wants to be closer to the door. Candy looks worried about her, too; she keeps trying to get Mai's attention, but Mai is ignoring her, ignoring everyone, as if she is in her own world.

The whole energy of the group seems restrained today, as if there is some collective conspiracy not to get into too much. I wonder who has been talking to whom, outside the group this week? I've got to get a more accurate picture of what is going on behind the scenes. . . .

Hey, what's that? Is it my imagination, or is Megan finally going to say something? Look, her foot is fidgeting and she's playing with her hair. I know she needs an invitation to talk, but I wonder if this might be the moment in which she will jump in all on

her own. Should I cue her or not? Wait. I have a better idea. Paul appears to see the same thing I do. He is looking at me, as if to tell me that I should do something to invite Megan to say something. That's what I always do, though.

This time I think I'll let Paul do the work. Maybe it will help wean Megan of the notion that she needs to be invited to talk before she can say something. I know this is the way she has been treated her whole life. Her family never lets her talk at home, so why should she be any different here? But she can be different, starting right now! The first thing I've got to do, though, is switch direction from Cynthia (who is rambling now and seems to have lost the interest of the other group members) to cue Paul so he will bring out Megan.

The remarkable thing about this whole internal dialogue is that in the 1 minute this took place (Yes, that was only 1 minute in the mind of a group leader! Are you already exhausted?), all these assumptions, hypotheses, and observations were based completely on nonverbal behavior. It is certainly possible that if you train yourself to notice nuances in behavior, to watch behavioral cues, to decode underlying meanings that are just beneath the surface, you will mine a rich source of data that can be used to make accurate assessments about what is happening and then make informed choices about which interventions to choose.

For a Field Study

One of the best ways to learn about group dynamics and leadership is to familiarize yourself with the journals in the field that are devoted to group work. Spend some time in the library perusing the literature so that you can identify those sources that will be most valuable to you in the future. Many times you will find yourself confused and hungry for information about a particular problem.

There are hundreds of such journals that include articles about group leadership. Following are some of the specialized group sources you will wish to consult:

Group

Group Analysis

Group and Organization Management

Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice

Group Facilitation

Group Processes and Intergroup Relations

International Journal of Group Psychotherapy

Journal for Specialists in Group Work

Journal of Child and Adolescent Group Therapy

Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama, and Sociometry

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships

Leadership Quarterly

Small Group Behavior

Small Group Research

Social Work in Groups

What to Look For

All groups organize themselves in particular ways, with or without designated leaders. You could spend a whole lifetime trying to familiarize yourself with all the literature and research that has been accumulated on this subject. At some time you may wish to review a basic text on group dynamics (see Beebe & Masterson, 2008; Forsyth, 2005; Levi, 2007) that reviews the science of group behavior, including topics such as interpersonal attraction, conflict, performance, decision making, problem solving, power, influence, team building, and so on. Here is a review of some basic ideas.

PROXEMICS

Proxemics is a term introduced by anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1966) to describe set measurable distances between people as they interact. Proxemics specifically describes the social use of space in the physical world, and personal space in particular. Personal space can be understood as the area with invisible boundaries surrounding an individual's body. This area functions as a comfort zone during interpersonal communication (Nova, 2005). It disappears in some environments such as an elevator or crowd but can often be managed in a group setting. As you surely know from your own life and interactions with others, people adjust their physical distance from one another according to the degree of attraction or tension they feel. There have been studies done that actually measure

the number of inches that people stand from one another when they talk and how that is correlated with physical attraction. Obviously, friends stand closer than strangers, women tend to be more comfortable than men with intimate space, and when you like someone you are inclined to approach that person more closely.

In a group, you will want to watch the ways that members seat themselves—who they prefer to sit next to and who they position themselves opposite from. Watch not only for where people choose to sit, and how close they sit to one another, but also notice the body positioning and other clues that may reveal inner states. See if people move their chairs out of the group or how they adjust them. Who always sits next to the leader? Who is closest to the exit? It is surprising how much you can learn from simple observations of space. Furthermore, people tend to engage in rather predictable patterns that are often unconscious to them, so pointing these patterns out can provide a portal to exploring how one is relating to the group on a conscious and unconscious level. Many of your observations will lead to theories about what is happening between people. Rather than laying out your theory in a group, the group leader usually just needs to make the observation and let the group members make sense of why they are doing what they do.

Student Voice

Sitting Next to the Leader

One of my big insights in group came from understanding why I always sat right next to the leader. Of course that also translated into my life where I often stand with those people who can protect me. This may sound obvious now, but I was terrified of group for months. I did not want to join it since it was so scary. Based on my past, I found it hard to trust people, and I thought people simply wouldn't be kind to me. Furthermore, I felt they would attack me if I talked. So I sat next to the leader seeking protection, with the feeling and belief that he would keep me safe. And he did, and it led me to actually take the risk to expose my fears to the group and allowed them to support me. It was better than I expected, and I did feel safe, but I saw that most of the safety came from the other group members. Oddly enough, but not so odd now, it was after finally taking the risk and being accepted that I started sitting away from the leader. I did not need him to protect me anymore, and I began to figure out that maybe I did not need protection in my life.

Of course, the structure of how and where people sit has major significance for how you decide to arrange the room. You would be amazed at how often leaders fail to organize the room in such a way that is conducive to open communication, shared responsibility for the meeting, and constructive interaction. In a typical classroom, for example, chairs are arranged so they all face the front.

Besides the instructor, the only other thing you can see are the backs of classmates' heads. This works well if you believe that all learning emanates from the mouth of the instructor and that nothing valuable happens as a result of group interaction (it also is the most efficient use of space when resources are limited). If your goal, however, is to encourage group members to interact with one another, then a far better arrangement is one in which people sit in a circle in a way that every person can directly see each other and nobody has to careen around to catch someone's eye. In any groups that you lead, make certain that you arrange the room in such a way that the seating is most conducive to the structure and atmosphere you wish to create. If you see some changes, then simply ask people to move in or move back. If the leader states that this is important, the group will also learn that it is important.

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

When observing members in your group, you will want to monitor not only their body positioning but also other nonverbal states. In a previous section, we looked at the interactive patterns among members; you will also want to examine behavioral cues that let you know what people are thinking and feeling. People say a lot by the body language and posture (are they leaning in, slouched over and tired, agitated with their arms crossed, etc.); their behavior movements (nervous twitch, tapping of the foot, wringing of the hands, etc.); and the direction of their gaze and attention. Of all the nonverbal behaviors—body movements, posture, gaze, voice—the face is probably the most commanding and complicated, and perhaps the most confusing (Cohn & Ekman, 2005). The face is commanding because it is always visible, and always communicating something. The face really cannot hide, as there is no facial equivalent to the concealment maneuver of putting one's hands in one's pockets. Whereas sounds and the body movements that illustrate speech are intermittent, the face, even in repose, may provide information about some emotion or mood state.

You notice, for instance, that one group member is smiling a lot, but this expression is incongruent with the serious nature of what he is saying. Another participant sits quietly, seemingly without a care in the world, but every time a particular subject comes up, you notice a short tensing around the eyes. All these are cues that are fair game for a group leader to call out and draw attention to. We tend to keep our observations rather direct and to the point with group members. If Alec is tapping his foot, we might say, "Alec, I notice that your foot keeps tapping." If Bea is rolling her eyes, we might say, "Bea, what is happening with your eyes right now?" If Cole is clinching his fists, we might say, "Cole, what are doing with your hands?" All these simple statements are meant to allow the

group member to become more aware of the behavior, and then give them a chance to talk about it, or verbally communicate what the behavior is trying to say. Often, we find that group members say, “Oh, it is nothing I do that all the time.” When that happens we tend to withdraw and say, “Okay, but if we see it again we mention it.” The key here is drawing attention to patterns and essentially bringing words to what the nonverbal behavior is trying to say.

For Reflection

Professional poker players watch one another carefully for “tells” that give away clues about how an opponent is feeling at any given moment—nervousness, jubilation, caution, frustration. By watching nonverbal behavior, they hope to identify whether someone is bluffing or not by identifying consistent patterns. Since poker playing is shown on television all the time, take a moment to watch the nonverbal communication that is happening during a game.

Closer to home, look around your class to identify the “tells” of classmates, as well as the instructor. How do particular individuals act when they are excited or frightened? How can you tell when your instructor is disappointed or frustrated? How can you determine when he or she is greatly satisfied with what is happening?

One of the most difficult challenges of leading groups, distinguishing it from individual sessions, is to monitor the way a dozen or more different individuals are reacting to what is happening at any given moment. That job becomes so much easier if you teach the group members to monitor their own behavior, as well as that of the others, so that you do not have to be continuously responsible for knowing what is going on every second.

SILENCES

It is not just what people say that matters, but also what they do not say, and how they choose not to say it. It is impossible not to speak; sometimes the “loudest” members of the group will be screaming through their dramatic withdrawal. Jeffrey recalled one memorable group in which during the go-around, one member, with arms crossed and chair pulled back, announced that he had nothing to say. This was very unusual behavior because it had become a norm that everyone would briefly check in to start the group. If someone really did not want any attention, all he or she would need to do is make up some report, or give a perfunctory statement such as, “Well, not much going on this week. I’m doing well and feeling fine.”

When pressed by other members, and Jeffrey, as to what was going on, the man insisted that nothing was happening; he just had nothing to say. Throughout the rest of the session, he sat with his arms crossed, scowling and looking bored. He never said another word to the group (and dropped out the next session), but he completely dominated the meeting with his dramatic silence.

Silence is often a very normal, natural, useful part of any group session. It gives members time to think, reflect on things, formulate or process ideas, take a breath, or just relax a little between intense intervals. It is rather important during group sessions to establish norms that it is okay to be quiet for a while; otherwise, people will continuously chatter even when they have nothing to say.

Kurzban (2007) outlined five functions of silence. The first function is *linking* in which silence binds people together such as a “moment of silence,” a silence during prayer, or a silence after someone makes an inappropriate remark. The second function is an *affecting function* in which the silence has an effect on the others in the room that might communicate indifference, dislike, or coldness. A third type of silence is the *revelational function* of silence by which people show they don’t know what to say or cannot provide an appropriate response. A fourth function of silence is *judgmental*, which may indicate approval or disapproval to what has been said. In group settings, this can be seen as “silence as admission” by not responding to an individual or a type of silent protests. The last function of silence is *activation* in which a group member may be silent while choosing words before speaking. The impression might be that a group member is quiet and doing nothing, but in reality the group member is pondering what to say and how to respond.

For Reflection

You are leading a group in which you just summarized what you believe has been happening the past few minutes. You intend this as a transition to the next segment, whatever that might be. After your brief reflection on events that have transpired, there is a long silence afterward. You look around the room and see people looking down, shuffling their feet, but nobody looks like they are ready to speak any time soon. What should you do?

The correct answer to this question (and you should commit it to memory) is “IT DEPENDS.”

What you do as a leader in *any* situation depends on your reading of what is going on. How can you determine what you should do in any clinical situation until you have first formed a hypothesis about what is going on and, based on the assessment, figured out what is needed to move things along in a constructive manner?

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What you do with silence, any silence, depends on your interpretation of what is really going on.

Is this silence thoughtful and reflective in which members are musing about what they want to say? If so, then wait.

Is this silence indicating confusion because they don't know what you want from them? In that case, you'll need to clarify further.

Or perhaps there is some collective resistance going on. Maybe members resent the interpretation you offered and feel resentful, so they are punishing you by remaining quiet.

Or another possibility might be that they are hiding, afraid to speak out of fear because they don't feel safe.

In each case, depending on what you assess is going on, that would dictate a different sort of intervention.

Beginning group leaders view silence among their most dreaded critical incidents. What you actually do in such situations depends very much on what you believe the silence means. If it is productive time for reflection, then you might let it go for a while. But if people are confused, looking for direction, feeling unduly anxious or uncomfortable, you might need to do something. Our favorite option, by the way, in this or any other situation, is to cue other members to do the work rather than having to take the lead ourselves: "I'm curious, Jackson, about what you think the silence means right now?"

For a Field Study

Try out this method on your own. Next time you are in a group situation in which you become aware that you are having a strong reaction (boredom, anxiety, frustration, anger, amusement), look at others carefully until you find someone you are pretty certain is feeling the same way as you are. As you are probably well aware, some people show what they are feeling so easily you can read them instantly.

Cue this person to speak out loud what you sense is being felt by you and others. Validate this person's experience by sharing your own reactions as well.

One of us might notice, for instance, that we are feeling bored in the group and interpret the silence to mean that there is a marked lack of motivation and energy on that day. The increasing quiet times do not appear to be useful; they are making the session seem interminable. Rather than confronting this situation ourselves, and risking the usual strong reactions to leader behavior, we can

scan the group and notice someone else who appears to feel the same way. That is a possible signal to cue that member to do the work for us: “Arthur, I notice that you are looking bored by what’s been happening in the group today. When Kara was speaking earlier, you seemed particularly distracted. Maybe you could talk about what’s going on for you today?”

It is also useful to determine the role that silence is serving in the group. In the early stages of a group, extended silences may be creating unnecessary anxiety in group members, so he might break the silence to move the group along. Later on, however, we might explore what silence means for group members. In established groups, we rarely break silences but might make process observations such as “I notice it is quiet today.”

The important thing to remember about silence is that it can be extraordinarily useful, a waste of valuable time, or even destructive. Are members being resistant or defensive? Are they punishing you or others through withdrawal? Perhaps members do not understand what you want. Maybe they are afraid of saying the wrong thing—this could be evidence that trust levels are not yet sufficient to do what you expect. You have to read what exactly the silence means and then respond accordingly.

For a Field Study

Find a place where you can watch unobtrusively a group of people interact with one another. This can be at a playground, a party, a dinner, or even in a class. Pretend you are an expert in interpersonal behavior, whose job it is to make inferences and predictions about how people are likely to act in the future. Like any respectable anthropologist or social scientist, make field notes about what you observe. Try to uncover clues as to what people are really saying to one another and what they really feel and think inside.

Try to identify sources of tension and conflict. Figure out who is most attracted to whom. What are people feeling and thinking but not saying out loud?

Member Roles

In a group setting, not every group member does the same thing. Like every other group you have been a part of in your lifetime (such as your family, sports team, friendship group, work group), you know that people take on different roles and tasks, some of which are stable and ingrained (always needing to be the center of attention) and others that are situational and contextual (being quiet around

older people). Each group contains a degree of differentiation of roles and tasks among group members. In that sorting out, you can see that people do different things in a group setting that lead to different outcomes. People adopt particular roles in groups depending on (a) what they have done in the past, (b) the composition of the group, and (c) what gets triggered by the unique dynamics of the situation. These characteristic roles can be seen as basically facilitative, as a maintenance function, or obstructive to the process and goals of the groups (Capuzzi & Gross, 2006). When someone takes the lead in supporting others, as well as offering encouragement, this role is often helpful. Yet another variation of this theme can be dysfunctional when an overly supportive member continuously rescues people when things get intense because of his or her own fears of intimacy.

Another common dynamic has to do with *scapegoating*, in which some members disown or project unacceptable parts of themselves onto others. When it appears as if one designated person is the only one to exhibit strong feelings of guilt, anger, or shame, this person is actually serving as the “lightning rod” for others’ uncomfortable feelings (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). This could easily happen, for example, when tension is high and one member takes the risk of talking about what is going on. This person can end up being the scapegoat, not only for that interaction but also for others in the future. Just as often that one member is repeatedly attacked as a scapegoat for the group’s disowned feelings, another might very well become designated the “holy cow” (Schoenwolf, 1998). This person is idealized in the group as a sacred object, or the favorite child, just as so often happens in a family. That person can do no wrong in the group; the feedback from that person is highly valued, and other group members always respond in a pleasing manner. These are just a few of the dynamics that often develop with respect to designated roles.

A number of writers have catalogued the typical roles that people play in groups. In families, Satir (1972) classically identified four different roles that block good communication among members: (a) The placater appears to be accommodating and cooperative (“I’ll do whatever you want”) but actually sabotages things by refusing to say what is really thought and felt. (b) The blamer plays the opposite role (“This is all your fault”), using criticism and aggressive tactics to put others on the defensive. (c) The irrelevant member is distracting and annoying (“That reminds me of a story”) to the point where it is difficult to work cooperatively. (d) Finally, the super-reasonable member appears at first to be very helpful (“Logically, this all comes down to basic needs”) but actually prevents any deep level intimacy from occurring.

These typical dysfunctional roles in families often occur in groups, in addition to others that have been identified. The “aggressor” keeps everyone off balance by trying to control others. The “monopolist” attempts control by filibuster: talking

so often that nobody else has a chance to contribute. For the “rescuer,” who keeps things from getting too deep, or the “withdrawn” member who says nothing at all, the object is to hide as long as possible.

For Personal Reflection

Think about your behavior and roles in the past and present as a member of important groups throughout your life, which should include but not be limited to the following:

- Family of origin
- Social groups or organizations
- Friendship groups
- Work groups
- Other significant groups in your life (such as sports teams, military experience, other group therapy experiences, other cohorts)

What roles do you play in groups? Why do you play these roles? What are the behaviors associated with these roles, and consider what you felt able to say/do/feel in this role and what was limited. As you look at your roles over time, consider any patterns that emerge or significant changes in your role. Try and explain why your roles have changed.

In addition to the various dysfunctional roles, there are also constructive roles that members play to further process and task goals (Gladding, 2008). The “facilitator” works as a host to make people feel welcome and comfortable. The “gatekeeper” keeps people on task, making sure that established norms are honored. The “compromiser” acts as a mediator during conflicts. The “energizer” motivates people during times of boredom or when some action is needed. “Information seekers” work to collect relevant data and help members share information. The “evaluator” lets the group know how things are going, encouraging adjustments for greater efficiency.

As we have listed the numerous types of group roles that have appeared in the scholarly and popular literature, we have to admit feeling a bit uncomfortable with these ways of categorizing people. In one sense, knowing that there are common roles that people take on is helpful in terms of recognizing patterns that may require intervention to help members get out of their established ruts. Yet there is also a coercive, “colonizing” effect of labeling people and placing them into preexisting schemas. Postmodern and narrative frameworks propose that many roles are put on us from the environment, culture, and media and do not truly represent who we are nor who we would like to be in group settings. Group roles can define people in negative ways and present little evidence for

alternative roles. We bring this up as a caution for group leaders to understand group roles as being more fluid than concrete, and as a reminder that many of the roles that group members adopt are ones that they have been taught, influenced, or forced to adopt. This can be particularly true for members of oppressed or marginalized groups who are often put into specific roles based on stereotypes.

Relational-cultural theorists such as Judy Jordan, Jean Baker Miller, and others have advocated that roles are not only indoctrinated into historically marginalized group members but also that they almost always take place within a relational field (Jordan, 2009). The connections between and among people are considered the greatest healing forces, but it is among these very connections that roles are formed and stabilized. Many women thus learn to be passive, deferential, and accommodating in groups because of the interpersonal context that is so much a part of early training. In contrast, many men learn to be dominant, competitive, and task oriented in groups. This offers a cautionary warning to be careful of the ways we view client roles that can be so limiting and one-dimensional.

The important point is to recognize that all groups naturally (and with prodding from the leader) create a division of labor. The point has been made by evolutionary biologists (Buss, 2007; Dugatkin, 1999) that one of the attributes that makes us so successful as a species is our tendency to specialize in various functions within groups. One person in a tribe hunts, while another skins and cleans, another cooks, and another cleans up. In groups, as well, members will organize themselves into different roles that are needed for things to proceed in an orderly manner (unless the goal is to keep others from getting too close). This is both natural and highly efficient—it is inborn for us to function as part of a collective tribe.

Regardless of the roles played by various group members, or those that you feel are important for participants to adopt in order to be facilitative, your job as leader is to teach everyone to serve several important functions for one another, and for themselves, in order to get the most from the experience. These can include, but are not limited to, the following roles suggested by Berg, Landreth, and Fall (2006):

1. Group members will each be valued, and in turn, be encouraged to value one another. If nothing else is accomplished, or no specific goals are identified, at the very least all members should be helped to feel validated and supported.
2. Group members will feel that they are understood. The leader will model appropriate listening and responding behavior, but beyond these fundamental skills, an essential value that develops in the group is that everyone should play a role in helping others feel they have been heard.

3. Group members will work collaboratively, sharing in decision making and owning responsibility for the outcome. You must make it clear that this is their group, not yours. Your job is to act as the facilitator, but their job is to make sure that the group meets their own needs.

For a Class Activity or a Field Study

Find a group of about six members, either among classmates or friends. Explain that this is a fantasy exercise, but for it to work, you all have to pretend that it is real, that you are all really in this predicament. Unless everyone is prepared to take the task seriously, you will not experience a meaningful demonstration of group dynamics and roles.

You are all traveling together via a small cruise ship that encounters an unexpected storm. The ship sinks, and you are the only survivors who have been washed ashore on a deserted island. You have an unlimited supply of fresh water but limited food supplies on the island, enough to last all of you just a few weeks.

After having rested and recovered, you meet together to decide your fate and make some preliminary decisions about how you will live, how you will govern yourselves, and what you will do to survive.

The particular content of your group discussions are relatively unimportant. This is merely a vehicle by which you can observe and experience various group roles and dynamics that you have read about.

After spending about 20 or 30 minutes in your survival simulation, debrief one another by talking about how you functioned together, the roles each of you played in the group, and the aspects of your behavior that were both effective and dysfunctional. Talk about what you learned from this exercise and what you can use from it in your life.

For Review: High- and Low-Functioning Groups

When you put together what you now understand, you will see an image emerging of groups that work well, and others that do not. The following are the characteristics of the best and most effective groups (Johnson & Johnson, 2008).

1. Participants know what is expected of them. Their individual goals are consistent with those of the group.
2. Decision-making procedures are matched with the situation so that different methods are used at different times. Healthy norms are established that permit a balance between structure and spontaneity.

3. There is a high degree of trust, safety, and cohesion in the group. There is a high level of honesty and openness in the group so that constructive feedback is shared.
4. Information and experiences are shared readily among participants.
5. The style of leadership is described as democratic, with shared responsibility, rather than authoritarian or laissez-faire (passive). Goal accomplishment, internal maintenance, and developmental change are underscored.
6. Conflict and disagreement are viewed as constructive and seen as the key to high quality and creative decision making and problem solving. Conflicts are worked through rather than ignored.
7. Conflicts of interests are resolved through negotiation and mediation so that agreements are reached that maximize outcomes and leave all members satisfied.
8. Communication flows in multiple directions so that the open and accurate expression of feelings is emphasized.
9. There is an equitable distribution of power, control, and contributions. Ability and information determine influence and power.
10. There is consistent observable growth and change among the members, not just in the group but also in their day-to-day lives.

Keep in mind that the dynamics described in this chapter represent general principles, especially as applied to groups among mainstream North American populations. You have learned previously that members of various cultural groups may behave according to different norms and have different expectations (Anderson, 2007). For example, dimensions of power and prestige develop in different ways among group members of some cultural groups over others. What this means is that with all the concepts contained in this chapter and book about group dynamics and processes, you must make adjustments according to the unique background of the people you help.

Review of What You Learned

- Working in groups is inherently different from working with individuals. The shift from linear to circular causality underscores the influence that group members have on each other at all times.

- Systems theory contributes the idea of conceptualizing a group as one large entity that constantly reorganizes itself as it tries to maintain a sense of balance (homeostasis). Groups usually are inclined to return to familiar states (equilibrium). Group coalitions, or subsystems, work to achieve balance in a group. Each smaller group coalition has specific boundaries that control who can join and what can be said to whom.
- The idea of group settings as a “social microcosm” suggests that one’s interpersonal style and maladaptive patterns that are present in everyday life will ultimately appear in a group setting regardless of the attempts to hide patterns or behave in a new way. Ultimately, the member’s true interpersonal self will appear.
- Family of origin issues constantly appear in group settings as people respond to people and situations in maladaptive ways that are reminiscent of their past. Effective groups provide the opportunity for a “corrective emotional experience” to work through these past difficulties via honest feedback and support.
- Proxemics, nonverbal behavior, and silence are all ways in which group members communicate in group settings. Effective leaders call attention to what is trying to be communicated.
- Group members often play roles in a group setting that frequently represent familiar and reoccurring roles from their own past experiences in other groups. These roles can be both facilitating and hindering to effective group communication.

