

Southern Adventist University
School of Social Work and Family Studies

Group dynamics paper

By

Mike Hoback

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Dr. Jennifer Nestell

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Summary

The group I will be discussing is group psychotherapy for military individuals with PTSD. Group therapy is thought by many in the field of PTSD as the most beneficial psychotherapy available for the treatment of individuals with PTSD, especially for military personnel and veterans. Group treatment is practiced in VA PTSD clinics and Vet Centers for military veterans and in mental health and crisis clinics for victims of assault and abuse.

A group of peers provides an ideal therapeutic setting because trauma survivors are able to risk sharing traumatic material with the safety, cohesion, and empathy provided by other survivors. As group members achieve greater understanding and resolution of traumatic themes, they often feel more confident and able to trust.

Critique

Upon entering the group counseling I first felt out of place and withdrawn. I remember thinking these people were crazy for discussing their issues with others. The leader of the group was once again Mike Bearden who was individual counselor so this made me feel a little more at ease. And for some reason because the individual I had interviewed was there also and that also helped me which I thought was odd seeing as how I had interviewed him but maybe it was because I believed I had to act like I didn't have a problem discussing my own issues.

I can honestly say that even at the end of the first meeting I felt it had helped me but the real change came after the meeting. I did not know that after the session they had a cookout and everybody stayed around. As we sat and talked I found that I had more in common with some of these guys than what I first believed. Don't get me wrong there were others that I still felt were "crazy" but I felt a bond. One individual that I actually bonded with first was a Vietnam War veteran. This guy was standing there and showing pictures of when he was in Vietnam and I

noticed in the photos he was holding a head. I kept thinking to myself “this dude is really crazy”. He sat and told me about his return home and the issues he faced. He discussed how he hated authority because when he came home he was hitchhiking back home and was stopped in Georgia for no reason a beaten by the police. Although I know this has no relevance to my issues I do remember thinking that at least when I came home society welcomes the soldiers back. Going through the issues these individuals were going through and then how they were being treated by society on top of that. Boy what it must have been like to not have anybody to reach out to. That brings us to the Veterans Readjustment Center. These centers are separate from the VA and were founded by veterans returning from Vietnam because they were not getting the treatment they needed. It seemed wired to me that these individuals suffered so much so that soldiers now don’t have to.

As for the leadership of the group I don’t believe I can ever compare anybody to Mike Bearden. He truly makes every individual in the meeting feel as though they were important. He gave each a chance to talk and eased the ones that didn’t want to into conversations. Group therapy seems to go directly against what you are trained for in the military. You are trained to no speak when other people are around and to keep your problems and issues to yourself. I believe in attending these groups it has helped me somewhat to speak more openly in a group. Even the other day in class when we had to go around and tell your name and where you saw yourself working after school I felt uneasy but before I don’t think I would have said as much as I did. So even though I don’t see improvement right away I think it continues to help me. I believe a lot of the group’s success depends on its members and their willingness to open up and with a good leader it makes it easier. I’m not really to sure that if Mr. Bearden left I would continue to attend the meetings even though I have made several other relationships. I not too sure what I would

have done different from what Mr. Bearden did and he is who I look at and want to be like when I get into counseling. He made each individual in the group feel as if they were important and called them by their first name, knew about their history, what branch of the military they served in and about personal relationships they were involved in. I know we are taught that as a social worker you have to keep boundaries and I believe he truly does however he makes the individuals in the group feel as though he is their friend and their issues are important to him.

Reflection

I started attending individual counseling at the Veterans Readjustment Center here in Chattanooga upon my arrival home from Iraq. I spent several months with individual counseling before Mike Bearden who is the director of the center first brought up group counseling to me. At first I had no interest in this as I believed I need to keep my issues to myself and only talk to Mr. Bearden about the problems I was facing. I remember several sessions later he would keep bringing up the issue of me doing group counseling which they offered at the same location. I kept telling him I would think about it but really never gave it any serious thought. This went on for a few years and I never did attend any group counseling sessions.

Well while taking this class last semester I had to conduct several interviews with a client and conduct a bio-social assessment of them. Well against all the rules of social work I think I got a little too close to the individual I was counseling as I saw him as a younger version of myself and facing the same problems as I had. After conducting one of my interviews with the individual Mike Bearden and I were standing outside talking and the client, Mr. Parker walked up after checking out. The three of us stood and talked for about 30 min and once again Mike Bearden brought up the issue of group counseling and stated that it may be good for both of us to

attend this once a week class. Well Mr. Parker was all for it if I would do it with him and even though I thought group counseling never works I agreed to attend one. I have since attended several of them and I have noticed that as the members of the group work through their trauma-related shame, guilt, rage, fear, and uncertainty, they start to focus on the present rather than the past. Telling you story and directly facing the anxiety and the guilt related to the trauma appears to enable these members to go on with their lives rather than getting stuck in the unspoken despair and helplessness.