

Time to Re-Group

While group psychotherapy is a well-known and effective treatment intervention, the pandemic has made typical execution of this therapeutic modality challenging. With much of the United States starting to reopen business and community activities, allowing for the reintroduction of in-person group psychotherapy as a treatment option, the *American Journal of Psychotherapy's* just-published special issue on group psychotherapy is fortuitously timed.

The issue was edited by Fran Weiss, L.C.S.W.-R., B.C.D., who holds a dual faculty appointment as Associate Clinical Professor in the Departments of Psychiatry and Environmental Medicine & Public Health at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in addition to operating her private practice. She is also on the Board of Directors for the International Board for Certification of Group Psychotherapists at the American Group Psychotherapy Association and serves as the Cochair of the Standards Committee for Certification. She lent her four decades of experience with group psychotherapy to bring together subject-matter experts to discuss this modality, now recognized as its own specialty.

The issue kicks off with an overview of the recent developments in group psychotherapy research, emphasizing its efficacy for individuals with anxiety, obsessive-compulsive, depressive, eating, and posttraumatic stress disorders in terms of disorder-specific symptom reduction, with alliance and cohesion as demonstrated predictors of outcomes. With efficacy thus established, the issue turns to address critical facets:

- **Recognition:** With recognition of group psychology and group psychotherapy (GPGP) as a specialty, the American Psychological Association has established standards for education and training. Continuing quality improvement in group therapy will require settings to embrace this specialized training and permanently dispel the notion that those trained in individual psychotherapy are thereby qualified to run groups.
- **Recommending group over individual therapy:** Group therapy offers patients a setting for engaging with therapists and peers to examine relationships and receive feedback on relational behaviors. Patients learn

to sustain more intimacy in their lives and to see that people are ultimately more alike than they are different.

- Participant hesitancy: Obstacles to patient participation in group therapy include fear of shame and humiliation. Likewise, therapists may avoid delivering group therapy because of fears of inadequacy and shame. Yet it is the power of the group experience to encourage expression and processing of shame that can serve as an antidote to these factors.
- Coleader conflict: While the factors that promote an effective coleader alliance have been explored often, how to repair this alliance once a conflict arises in coleaders' interactions with the group has received less attention. Coleader attachment styles, which influence the group psychotherapy process, the quality of the coleader alliance, and group member outcomes, can also provide clues about how to heal ruptures in the coleader alliance.
- COVID-19: Because in-person meetings might still be challenging for the foreseeable future, the issue includes an important discussion about factors correlated with positive outcomes in group therapy, such as the therapeutic alliance, that seem to be achievable in online formats (although group cohesion may develop more slowly).
- Race: When issues of diversity and systemic racism infiltrate group therapy in the form of microaggressions, self-examination guided by a mindfulness strategy tool can help group leaders and members stay engaged in challenging discussions related to race by grounding the group and creating more space for connection and healing.

The issue is available online now at
<https://psychotherapy.psychiatryonline.org/toc/apt/74/2>.