

Involuntary clients are different: Strategies for group engagement using individual relational theories in synergy with group development theories

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Abstract: *Groupwork has always been interested in empowering individuals to help themselves and others. Within successful therapeutic groups, group process is central to and provides a unique way of helping. Most of the research has been with voluntary populations, and the groups have already been in existence or are naturally formed groups.*

Focusing on involuntary clients, my research studied the use of individual relational theories, in conjunction with group engagement theories. Understanding the relational aspects of the group interactive process has provided another way to conceptualize the engagement process with involuntary clients. This paper combines individual and group theories in order to construct a conceptual model for theory building and effective practice with involuntary clients.

It was found that with an involuntary population the group leaders' acceptance of the anger that group members initially bring to this interaction is especially important. This is the beginning of the engagement process with involuntary clients.

Keywords: *involuntary population, engagement, group process, group facilitation with involuntary clients, angry involuntary clients*

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Introduction

Most of what has been studied about groups and group engagement has been predicated on voluntary engagement. Yet our membership in groups is not always voluntary: sometimes we are placed into groups because of attributes over which we have no control. At other times individuals are mandated to participate in groups. With courts, child welfare services, corrections and schools increasingly mandating clients to services, the number of involuntary clients being seen in treatment groups is growing.

While we know some things about the engagement of individuals within voluntary groups we know much less about the engagement of individuals within involuntary groups. (Behroozi, 1992; De Jong & Berg, 2001; Garvin, 1997; Goldberg-Wood & Middleman, 1997; Ivanoff, Blythe & Tripodi, 1994; Macgowan, 2003; Markus, & Abernethy, 2001; Plasse, 2000; Robbins, 2003; Rooney, 1992; Rooney & Chovanec, 2004; Thomas & Caplan, 1999; Trotter, 1999). This paper attempts to describe the ways in which social group workers would best be able to engage involuntary clients in groups, applying the results of a doctoral study which explored the concordance between the views of experienced practitioners and involuntary group members' views as to what practices were most effective in achieving engagement.

This research was privileged to include the clients' voice as well as the practice wisdom of practitioners with years of experience leading involuntary groups. Combining individual relational theories: affect attunement (Stern, 1985) the holding environment (Winnicott, 1965), and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) in conjunction with group development theories (Bion, 1961; Garland, Jones & Kolodny, 1965; Schiller, 1997; Shulman, 1988 & 1994), allows us to construct an individual/group conceptual model that can guide both theory and practice.

What has also developed from this study is a process for dealing with involuntary clients that helps groupworkers understand how involuntary clients are different from voluntary clients, and how to effectively deal with those differences. An involuntary client is defined as:

one who is forced to seek, or feels pressure to accept contact with a helping professional. (Rooney, 1992, p. 6)

Rooney further divides involuntary clients into two other categories: Mandated Clients, and Nonvoluntary Clients.

Mandated Clients must work with a practitioner because of a legal mandate or court order ... and a Nonvoluntary Client has contact with helping professionals through pressure from agencies, referral sources, other persons, family members, and outside events. (Rooney, 1992, p.6).

Review of literature

In studying the needs of involuntary clients, a number of group-related concepts were regarded as underpinning our understanding of group engagement. These include: engagement within groups, anger (Gans, 1989; Gans & Alanso, 1998; Kirman, 1995), group process with involuntary clients, and reactance theory. Additionally a number of individual-oriented theories have been included. These include: affect attunement (Stern, 1985), intersubjective space (Benjamin, 1999; Stolorow & Atwood, 1983), the holding environment (Winnicott, 1965), and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). While these are theories which are primarily used within individual therapy, using them within a groupwork setting provides an innovative way to understand group processes around engagement, especially when integrated with more commonly accepted theories of group development (Bion, 1961; Garland, Jones & Kolodny, 1965; Hartford, 1971; Northen, 1988; Schiller, 1997; Yalom, 1995), and group development with involuntary clients (Behroozi, 1992; Billow, 2003; Cowger, 1979; Garvin, 1997; Gans, 1989; Lee, 1997; Pam & Kemker, 1993; Robbins, 2003; Sheilds, 1999; Thomas & Caplan, 1999).

Engagement

Engagement is an area within social groupwork which has been comparatively neglected, with the exception of a few authors (Billow, 2003; Breton, 1985; Macgowan, 1997; McKay, Stowe, McCadam, &

Gonzales, 1996; Markus & Abernethy, 2001; Plasse, 2000; Rose, 1992). Further, engagement with involuntary clients is only beginning to be explored (Behroozi, 1992; Ivanoff, Blythe & Tripodi, 1994; Pam & Kemker, 1993; Rooney, 1992; Rooney & Chovanec, 2004; Thomas & Caplan, 1999).

The challenge for the group leader and group members within involuntary groups is to go beyond the agenda set for group members by authorities outside the group. To engage group members, one must enable group members to set an agenda which meets their needs as well as fulfilling what is needed by the outside authority. The group members' needs must be met in order for them to commit to the group, (Behroozi, 1992) learn from the experience, and see the group as 'theirs.' They need to choose to engage and 'become members' (Falck, 1988). Incorporating the individual theories (Stern, 1985; Stolorow & Atwood, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978; Winnicott, 1965) into the group's development provides a way to conceptualize the theory and the practice which helps to foster and support engagement behaviors.

The individual theories described herein are a way to conceptualize the engagement process that must occur in the beginning stage of the development of a group for the group to become cohesive. Macgowan (1997), conceptualizes engagement as a process which has seven dimensions. According to Macgowan, a group member is not fully engaged in social groupwork until there is minimal evidence of engagement in all seven dimensions

These seven dimensions include: 1) evidence of attendance, 2) verbal contribution, and/or participation in group activities, 3) support for the work of the leader, 4) interaction with members, 5) adoption of the mutual contract, 6) work on own problems, and 7) helping members in their work on their problems. (Macgowan, 1997, pp. 23-24)

There are few theoretical models for proactive work with involuntary groups in the social work literature, Rooney (1992), and Rooney & Chovanec, (2004) are some of only a few theorists to write about involuntary clients. They discuss the stages of change, and the need for involuntary clients to feel a sense of containment through agreed boundaries to enable them to begin some involvement with services that they did not choose. After the stages are assessed, and the boundaries

agreed upon, the use of individual theories presented in this paper provides a bridge to assist professionals understand and help group members engage within the group.

Individual theories applied to group engagement

Individual theories help to conceptualize engagement in a way that is different from group theory, but works well with engagement theories of groups. If one conceptualizes the relationship which develops at first between the group leader and group member as affect attunement (Stern, 1985), it is often easier to deal with and include angry group members. The group leader assesses the group member's affect and relates to that, which specifically helps the angry group member to eventually feel heard, accepted and valued. This behavior is much like the interactions described by Stern (1985) as he observed engaged mothers and their attunement with their infants.

At the same time this initial interaction occurs and is felt by the group member, other group members are observing this interaction. What occurs simultaneously is the development of group norms as group members observe the acceptance of anger, and concern for the individual group member. What is being created can be conceptualized as a 'holding environment' (Winnicott, 1965).

Winnicott (1965) discussed concepts of 'a holding environment and a good enough mother' to help us understand the needs of the mother-infant dyad and what was minimally required for the positive development of the infant. Both the mother and child influenced each other's development by their interactions. His concepts can be applied to a healthy well-functioning group, as the structure is parallel. The 'good enough mothering' provided by the group therapist is what is necessary for the growth and development of the group. The 'holding environment' is part of the developing culture of the group, and both group members and group leaders influence each other in that growth process.

A third individual oriented theory applicable to group engagement is Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the 'Zone of Proximal Development.' When applied to groups, this can be seen as a way to explain the way in which the interpersonal learning and growth occurs within the group. Vygotsky (1978) envisioned learning taking place within

a 'Zone of Proximal Development.' He defined the zone of proximal development as

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by the independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 86)

He suggested that what

is in the zone of proximal development today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow, what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow. (p. 87)

Good teaching pushes the student a little farther than what is currently within his/her grasp, and in reaching for the information it becomes easier to incorporate it into one's knowledge. Much of the interpersonal learning and development that takes place within a group can be attributed to group members learning from and teaching each other and the group therapist, as they interact, are accepted by the group leader initially, and then by others within the group.

The fourth individual theory is Stolorow and Atwood's idea of intersubjectivity (1983). Within involuntary groups, affect attunement includes the ability of the therapist to accept the client's anger. The client and group leader interact within an intersubjective space, and as they and subsequent dyads interact and are observed, that intersubjective space expands and the group culture of acceptance develops. The other group members have the opportunity to learn from and observe each dyadic interaction. Within involuntary groups, 'the leader must initially provide the cement for the group and community as-a- whole by dint of commitment to each person, making all members feel that it matters whether or not they are present' (Pam & Kemker, 1993, p. 423).

It is within the group that individuals come together in an intersubjective space. The group members simultaneously experience a situation from their own particular lens, expectations, perspective, and experiences, as well as from their common experience of the group situation. Luria (1981) speaks of the universal 'meaning' that people have of situations or experiences and the individual 'sense' that they

bring to the 'same' experience. What is unique to social groupwork and group psychotherapy is this process: the opportunity is provided within the shared group experience for each group member to learn from each other's perceptions and observations of this experience. This experience is, at once, the same and yet different; within the group they have a chance to share, discuss and perceive their common experience.

Methodology

A goal of this study was to identify group leaders' perceptions about factors which facilitate engagement. A second and third goal was to identify, from a group of randomly selected group members, their perceptions of the factors which facilitated their engagement, and to compare perceptions or look for core elements that elucidated attitudes or feelings. A fourth goal was to explore the relationships between group leaders' actions and group members' perceptions.

Practitioners' perspectives were compared to the perceptions of the group members as to what group leader behaviors were effective in engaging this population, and an objective measure of engagement, the Group Engagement Measure (GEM), (Macgowan, 1997) was used to support the qualitative data from the group leader and group member interviews.

Design

This exploratory case study combined both quantitative and qualitative research methods. It was based on a model of groupwork which draws on 20 years of experience working with this population and is an attempt to discern whether individual theories of interaction can be applied to the process of engagement, in order to enhance group development theories.

Because this study is based on personal experience, a number of safeguards were put into place to control for possible researcher bias. Three data points were required to be in agreement:

1. The Group Engagement Measure (Macgowan, 1997) was employed

as an objective measure in order to evaluate each individual's engagement within the group.

2. Individual interviews were conducted with group leaders
3. The third data point consisted of a randomly selected sample of the group members who were interviewed over the course of four follow-up discussions. Group members shared their views of the engagement process, as well as, their assessment of what it was about their group leader's behavior that made it easier for them to engage.

Nine group leaders completed the Group Engagement Measure (GEM) on each of the members of their group at the end of the fourth group session (at the end of the second session for the marathon group). In addition, face-to-face interviews with the nine group leaders were conducted after they assessed that the GEM indicated group members were engaged. Of the nine group leaders, eight of those selected (four leaders and four co-therapists) were interviewed at the fourth session of their groups. One leader was interviewed at the end of the second session of her marathon group.

Sample

A purposive sample was used to select group leaders. Groupworkers with a Master's degree in some human services, or graduate students supervised by someone with a Master's degree in human services working with involuntary clients in groups were initially sought from various agencies working with involuntary clients. A snowball sample evolved as clinicians who knew other clinicians offered suggestions of other people working with mandated clients.

The sample of group members was by random selection, with replacement of group members from within the groups of the previously selected group leaders who agreed to participate in this study. The population that was eventually studied represented a cross section from urban and rural areas in Illinois, as well as a rural area in Wisconsin. Agencies hosting the groups included two that served parents who were mandated to parenting classes from the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, one serving parents

mandated to parenting classes by the Wisconsin Department of Welfare, and two groups of men from downstate Illinois who had been found guilty of battery or abuse of someone in their family, mandated by the Illinois Criminal Courts.

Demographics of group leader sample

The sample of nine group leaders included 6 women and 3 men. Their ages ranged from 28 to 59. The average age was 44.7 years. Years in practice ranged from 3.5 years to 23 years. Average length in professional practice was 10.7 years. Education ranged from one group leader with 2.5 years of college and 11 years of experience leading groups, to one with two masters degrees and 23 years in practice with groups. Two other group leaders had BA degrees, with from 5 to 20 years of experience leading groups, respectively. Two had BS degrees with 6 and 8 years experience leading groups. Two had master's degrees, with 5.5 and 6 years of experience leading groups, and another group leader with 2.5 years of college had 11 years of experience leading groups.

Demographics of group member sample

The sample of ten group members interviewed included 8 men and 2 women. The ages ranged from 23 to 53. The average age was 28.2 years. Education ranged from one group member who had completed 2 years of college, to one group member who had dropped out of high school in the middle of ninth grade. Another group member had completed 2 years of college, 5 had graduated from high school, and 2 had graduated from high school and completed trade school.

Instrumentation

Quantitative

The assessment of the level of engagement was measured through the use of the Group Engagement Measure (Macgowan, 1997). The GEM was developed by Macgowan (1997) to identify a composite of the factors most commonly mentioned in the social groupwork literature.

The GEM measures

... seven dimensions of group engagement, they are: 1) evidence of attendance; 2) verbal contribution, and/or participation in group activities; 3) support for the work of the leader; 4) interaction with members; 5) adoption of the mutual contract; 6) work on own problems; and 7) helping members in their work on their problems. (Macgowan, 1997, p. 23-24)

The GEM has been used in a few previous studies (Macgowan, 1997, 2001), both with groups of graduate students, and groups of in-patient settings. It has not, however, been used previously with a strictly involuntary population. The GEM has reported acceptable reliability scores in one repeat measures study with alpha coefficients of .81 at first administration, and .84 at the second. For the test-retest reliability, the Pearson correlation between GEM scores at the first administration and the second was $r(80) = .66$. $p < .001$. The measures used to determine criterion validity were moderately to highly correlated with the GEM.

Qualitative

Two interview questionnaires/schedules were developed by the author. The first was used for the face-to-face interviews with each group therapist (at the completion of the fourth group session of four of the groups, and at completion of the second group session for the marathon group), for a total of 9 interviews, which lasted between 45 minutes to one and one half hours. The second schedule was used for the face-to-face interviews with the group members (after each of the first 4 group sessions of 4 groups, and after each of the first 2 group sessions in the marathon group), for a total of 33 interviews. These interviews lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes initially and as group members returned for subsequent interviews the interviews lasted up to 45 minutes. Both schedules were developed by the researcher in order to discern ways of understanding the central concepts being studied, and questions were based on the theories that are being studied.

The idea of theoretical and interpretive validity described by Maxwell (1992) seems to be the most appropriate way of addressing

the question of the validity of the two interview schedules. Since the interview schedules have been developed by this researcher, the question of validity needs to be addressed, Maxwell defines these forms of validity:

Theoretical validity refers to an account's validity as a theory of some phenomenon ... Interpretive validity is the recognition of the consensus of the perspective of the actors in that situation.

Any theory has two components: the concepts or categories that the theory employs, and the relationships that are thought to exist among these concepts. (p. 291)

Maxwell sees validity in a broad sense, as pertaining

to this relationship between an account and something outside of that account that as observers and interpreters of the world, we are inextricably part of it; we cannot step outside our own experience to obtain some observer-independent account of what we experience. Thus it is always possible for there to be different, equally valid accounts from different perspectives. (p. 283)

Validity categories are of much less direct use in qualitative research, than they are (or are assumed to be) in quantitative and experimental research (p. 296)

While quantitative research attempts to systematically address threats to validity, with prior design features, such as randomization and controls, in qualitative research

prior elimination of threats is less possible, because qualitative research is more inductive and because it focuses primarily on understanding particulars rather than in generalizing to universals (Erickson, 1986).

Maxwell suggests five categories of understanding relevant to qualitative research and five corresponding types of validity: (1) descriptive validity (the view can be either emic, from the participant's perspective, or etic, from the researcher's perspective (p. 289), (2)

interpretive validity (p. 288) the participants' perspective. . . participants' language, (3) theoretical validity (p 291), (4) generalizability- internal and external (p. 296), and (5) evaluative validity (p. 295).

The two types of validity that seem the most constructive and applicable for this study were interpretive validity and theoretical validity. Interpretive validity is the recognition of the consensus of the perspective of the actors in that situation (Maxwell, 1992). Included are 'intention, cognition, affect, belief, evaluation, and anything else that could be encompassed by what is broadly termed the participants' perspective' (Maxwell, 1992, p. 288).

Theoretical validity can be seen as analogous to construct validity in quantitative study and refers to the

concepts or categories that the theory employs, and the relationships that are thought to exist among those concepts. . . Corresponding to these two aspects of a theory are two aspects of theoretical validity: the validity of the concepts themselves as they are applied to the phenomena, and the validity of the postulated relationships among the concepts. The first is analogous to construct validity, and the second, analogous to internal or causal validity. (Maxwell, 1992, p. 291)

The questions for the group leaders' and group participants' interview schedules were developed from and examined the theoretical perspectives that underlie this investigation. They were not intended to provide generalizability, but to help to increase knowledge by ascertaining the participant's experience of the events because some of the issues are specific to this population and these groups (Maxwell, 1992). Validity issues in qualitative research focus primarily on understanding particulars rather than generalizing to universals (Erickson, 1986).

Data analysis

Individual responses of the group members followed by the responses of the group leaders were recorded, transcribed and then arranged both in order of their answers as well as combined with all responses to the same question. Respondents' answers were compared to each

other for similar responses and matched with the theories from which they derived. Secondly, an analysis was done of the groupings of individual responses by themes and commonalities. Themes among responses and ways in which they might relate to the theories used to formulate the initial assumptions about the process of engagement were articulated (Boyatzis, 1998). Finally, there was a comparison of the data from each of the three sources: themes from the group leaders, themes from the group members, and the results of the group engagement measures.

Responses to questions from group leaders

Reviewing the responses of the group leaders' answers to the questions led to my constructing three categories of responses:

- *Action: related to their performance or behavior*
Action Questions referred to group leader behavior. For example: what did you do/not do to engage group members? Do you expect any different actions, or interactions from involuntary groups? What role does your listening to the individual client's anger play? The responses spoke to their actions with their involuntary clients.
- *Meaning: theories or thinking which influenced their behavior*
Meaning Questions referred to the meaning they attributed to their actions with their involuntary group members. For example: What do you think influenced the group's engagement? What do you think fosters the engagement of involuntary clients? When does the involuntary group experience become meaningful (enough) for an individual to engage as a group member (during which group session)? How important do you feel that it is to accept the individual client's anger, to normalize and share these emotions within the group? Their responses spoke to the meaning that the group leaders attributed to their actions with their involuntary clients.
- *Emotion: awareness or feeling*
Emotion Questions referred to group leaders' feelings. For

example: What role does your listening to the individual client's anger play? How important do you feel it is to accept the client's anger? These questions spoke to the group leaders' feelings with and about involuntary clients, and elicited some of the group leaders' commitment to and enjoyment from working with this population.

Responses to questions from group members

Reviewing the responses of the group members' answers led to my constructing three groupings of responses: (a) Perceptions, why they were there, (b) Interactional issues, and (c) Emotions, (feeling accepted, and engaged).

A sample of perception questions included: What did you expect to happen in group? Were these expectations different from other groups that you have been in? Why did you keep coming back each week? Was it always because it was required, or was there something that happened in group that was provocative/supportive/interesting/helpful?

Samples of interactional questions were: Did you receive any emotional support or understanding from your participation in the group? Did you feel any more supported or understood over time? What made it okay for you to talk/participate/interact in the group? Did you feel that you could express your anger in the group? Did you observe other people express anger in the group? How was that handled? What effect did that have on you? These questions examined interactional issues that appear within the beginning stages of the group.

The final questions which were combined were emotion or feeling questions, and included questions such as: What made you feel that your opinion mattered? Did you feel accepted in the group? How did you come to feel that way? Was there anything that the group leader did that made you feel more a part of the group? All of these questions related to feeling accepted, offering opinions, and receiving support from others, i.e. did the group become a safe enough environment to allow for the give and take and the interaction that characterize a well running group? What was group member's perception of what actions, if any, the group leader took to foster that interaction?

Responses on the GEM

Lastly, results from the GEM, the face-to-face interviews of group leaders, and face-to face interviews of group members presents the opportunity to triangulate the information from three data points; group member, group leader and Group Engagement Measure. This enabled comparison from a variety of sources in order to see where they agree and what observations support each other. This also supported the group leaders' contention that the groups were engaged, and that the group members were engaged in the process and the purpose of the groups. The triangulation method, according to Boyatzis, assures another form of reliability - confidence in judgment, (Boyatzis, 1998, p.150). Boyatzis' inductive thematic analyses include: latent content analysis, criterion referenced code development, subsample analysis, and code development (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 16). Triangulation of methods meets a criterion for interpretive validity, to help us learn what the behaviors and events mean to the people engaged in and with them (Maxwell, 1992).

Some limitations of this study are inherent in the nature of a qualitative study. Those include: potential researcher bias, small sample size, lack of randomized controls, and lack of generalizability. A qualitative study, however, affords us an opportunity to give voice to a vulnerable population on an important issue, with a depth that can provide the basis for further study.

Results

There were themes which emerged from each group interviewed. Group leaders' responses as to what they saw as effective behaviors to foster interactions corresponded in many cases to what group members experienced as helpful and inclusive. For example, one group leader said

you have to treat your group members with respect regardless of how bizarre some of the comments might be, or off the wall you are setting the tone and that's when you set the tone for how they interact with each other.

Another group leader said,

generally I try to get these guys to answer questions, be part, participate so that they're having the enjoyment of some successes at that, and using humor effectively ... You are trying to allow your own vulnerabilities to show in a way that then draws others out, and then both of you kind of profit from, or the group profits from the experience. . . They are not just being sat and talked to, but they participate and sometimes the size of the group determines what you can try to do.

Another said

I think that helps a lot, in giving them the, you know, what they would describe as taking ownership in the group or just getting to be comfortable in the group.

Group leaders consistently mentioned boundary making, restatement of purpose, confidentiality, and acceptance of group members' anger, as actions which were uniformly instituted at the beginning of their groups. For example, one group leader said

you want them to see that anger, anger in itself is okay ... For you to become angry in group it's fine, and yeah we try to teach them this is how you deal with it ... so we allow the anger but I think we also want to process what they are angry about. . . One of the big things is that it shows them that yes you can get angry, yet it does not have to cause that reaction in somebody else, I think from listening to them, it's like the first time they got angry and somebody listened. They are waiting for you to yell back at them because they yelled, and that's our normal response ... All of a sudden they yelled, and you didn't, and it's like, oh wow! It's just something different so it throws them off guard and they listen.

Another said

I think that we need to model listening to somebody be angry without, you know, shutting them down and saying shut up I don't want to hear you complain.

Another leader added

But you can't just do that intellectually, you can, but it doesn't work. So you got

to do it, you got to do it experientially and if you won't listen to anger then you don't get to the feelings.

We allow the anger but I think we also want to process what they are angry about.

Group leaders also expressed satisfaction when group members engaged, although some weren't sure which of their leadership behaviors fostered this engagement. All of the group leaders, however, pointed to engaged behaviors of group members and most saw their group members as engaged. One leader said

I think you feel more successful with the involuntary than the voluntary, because they have that initial resistance, or seem like they don't want to connect with you or with each other.

Another said how

wonderful it felt when group members began to be aware that others felt the same and were dealing with similar issues than they were.

There was agreement as to engagement within all three data points:

1. group leaders in all groups reported that group members became engaged,
2. GEM results reported satisfactory engagement scores, and
3. group members related that they felt that group interactions were comfortable and more helpful than they had expected (Boyatzis, 1998, p 16).

The responses of group members were helpful in that they give voice to a vulnerable and often 'invisible' population. The group members discussed their perceptions of what happened within the groups, and how much help and support they received. Group members talked about interacting first with their group leaders, and then discovering ideas and experiences in common with other group members. Group members expressed surprise at the idea that they could in fact receive

help and in turn help others, and that the group leaders saw them as helpful and valued their opinions and experiences. For example, one group member said, 'They made me feel individualized-out' Another said, 'I was listened to, and I felt that I could offer my opinions.' There was also much discussion of how comfortable and safe the group actually became, how accessible and accepting the group leader was, and how that acceptance felt. This too seemed to surprise the group members. Another group member said, 'It helps to talk in the group ... It was also nice to be asked questions and know some of the answers' They were surprised that they could help others, as well, as be helped.

Practice guidelines

A number of practice guidelines emerged through analyzing groupworkers' answers, and in the follow up discussions with them.

1. Group leaders should expect group members to initially test authority. This is the group member's attempt to become visible, to determine whether they are seen as having value. Involuntary group members will initially test the boundaries to see how far they can go, and what reaction their actions will elicit from the group leader, which should be seen as reactance behavior and regarded as a sign of health. While that group member is testing the leader, other group members are observing those interactions, and they are deciding whether or not 'this is a safe place for me too.'
2. Group leaders should work to understand how important their initial acceptance of involuntary clients is and how necessary it is within the group process. The group member must feel accepted 'anger and all,' to be accepted as real, in order for the group member to engage.
3. Group leaders' purposeful behavior, e.g. 'modeling listening to someone being angry without shutting them down.' 'setting boundaries within a supportive environment,' initially sustains and fosters the affect attunement between the group leader and group member as they first interact. The acceptance by the group leader of the group member's anger and feelings of reactance towards services which are not of their choosing, and the group leader's redirection of those feelings is at the very beginning of the

acceptance which fosters engagement. These interactions were the beginning of setting up a group which is both welcoming and safe.

4. Group leaders should engage in alternately watching and supporting group member interactions, (pulling back and letting group members help each other in order to help group members get to the stage of being able to engage in the group process).
5. Lastly, group leaders are encouraged to monitor carefully the concordance between the messages sent and the messages received in the communications between group leaders and group members. Group leaders need to make sure that what they are trying to convey is in fact what is heard and reacted to by group members.

Implications for practice

Group leaders should understand the group member's reactance as a sign of health, and his/her anger as an expression of strength. With this reframed perspective, group leaders can provide the boundaries and develop the culture within which the group members are able to function. The concordance of communication between group leaders and group members provides us with a number of group leader behaviors which include group members, and elucidates from group members' perspectives of which behaviors have been perceived as helpful.

There seem to be steps to their inclusion. Group members relate to the group leader first, learn how to treat each other by watching how they are treated, and then begin to help each other, and to feel good about their ability to help, especially when coming from such a disadvantaged and vulnerable position initially. Group members reported their need to feel accepted, to have their anger accepted and then addressed. A number of group leaders spoke of the power of the group to help individuals feel valued and accepted. Experiencing the group's mutual-aid functions helped the group members feel as positive about helping another group member as they did about some of the assistance or support that they received. The experience of relating to one person first (the group leader) has an effect very much like Stern's (1985) idea of affect attunement between mother and child. This

corresponds with the behaviors within the group and from the group leader in the beginning stages of group development and combine to create a safe space within which to work.

Discussion

The importance of accepting anger in the creation of group culture

The relationships that developed between members and leaders were the result of purposeful behavior on the part of the group leaders. The group leaders were aware of their role in accepting the group members as the members entered the groups with their anger and resentments. Group leaders listened to and allowed others in the group to listen and relate to the depth of the anger and negative feelings which group members brought. As group members learned that their anger was accepted and listened to, and that there were options for constructively managing the object of that anger, other group members were being taught what was expected within these groups, what was acceptable, what was to be worked on and what was to be discussed. This appears to be the process within which the culture, values and norms of the group develop.

The group leaders expressed awareness of the movement within the groups as group members engage and then withdraw over the course of the group's development. They were aware of the importance of the relationship that develops in the space between the interactions, the intersubjective space (Stolorow & Atwood, 1983) appears paramount. Both the group leaders and the group members offered that it was the relationship which initially allowed the group members to begin to engage. Group members began to know what was expected of them and then to feel accepted enough to venture into interactions with the group leader. Group leaders initially develop and work within this intersubjective space to create the norms of acceptance, of trusting each other and of valuing difference. This is first experienced by the group member in their interactions with the group leader and is often the first time that 'they and their anger are accepted.' This is the beginning of group members' feelings of safety which eventually allows them to engage.

Accepting anger was seen as important in one way or another by

all of the group leaders interviewed. Accepting anger was felt to be instrumental in the groups members' engagement and in the affect attunement that develops the initial relationship between the group leader and group member. Group members learn how they will be treated from observing others and observing the norms and values that are reinforced within the group, as they develop into the culture of the group. Other group members reported feeling 'okay with the way that anger was handled' within the groups and also felt that then 'they, too, would be accepted.'

What was also expressed by group members, after they talked about their surprise at the comfort they were beginning to feel in the groups, was their 'joy in being able to relate to and even like people whom they initially did not want to interact with in a group.' Group members were 'surprised that they could help others and that their help was accepted, even desired.' They were surprised that 'it felt good to be able to offer help, and to be thought of as capable of giving that help.' All of this contributed to group members coming to experience the group as a holding environment (Winnicott, 1965). This comfort allowed them to risk and to take the interactions further and experience what Vygotsky (1978) envisioned when describing the zone of proximal development within which the learning from others occurs where members 'stretch and learn from their more developed peers.'

The space that is created within the group, whether conceptualized as a 'holding environment,' (Winnicott, 1965) or as the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978), develops as a culture; with shared experiences and a shared language of caring. Norms directed at helping the group members trust and grow within the group process builds a shared experience. Meaning is contextual, and develops within this social context (Bruner, 1986; Mishler, 1979).

In order to understand someone's ideas, exploration is easier if people have shared the experience. In sharing the experience, the understanding is deeper, and can be communicated in a different way because it is seen from various points of view (Luria, 1981). In successful involuntary groups, anger and hostile feelings are accepted and explored, and suggestions are offered for alternative ways to respond to situations or problems. Abreacting within a group setting helps members to explore their own feelings within a safe place, in order to try new behaviors (Cowger, 1979; Winnicott, 1965; Yalom,

1985). Group members can explore their own feelings and solutions to problems, but they also have the opportunity to observe other people and the variety of ways in which others react to similar problems (Vygotsky, 1981). Discussing the different experiences and perspectives is helpful if there is a respect for the variety of perspectives which are possible within a shared experience. Change and growth are more easily facilitated in a group with a culture of acceptance, caring and respect for differences. The group leaders interviewed in this study have come to know how to engage involuntary clients from their own experiences, from trial and error. The theories used in this study can underpin their actions.

This study has also been informed by the ideas of those most clearly affected by their involuntary status, the involuntary group members. In speaking to this researcher, they have shared their perceptions of what allowed them to engage in the groups they had to attend, and what group leader behaviors they felt were most effective. Group leaders shared their joy in working with this challenging population, and from realizing that their actions fostered growth and engagement within their groups.

It was a privilege to listen to and amplify the voices and insights of the disenfranchised group members, as well as, the voices of professionals who work on a day to day basis with individuals who, initially, don't want the services being offered. I hope that I have represented them fairly, and conveyed the joy that it is possible to take in this work and the power of the interactions within these groups.

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