INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY, 47(4) 1997

Working with Resistance to Experiencing and Expressing Emotions in Group Therapy

SUZANNE L. COHEN, Ed.D.

ABSTRACT

Emotional insight is essential in order for therapeutic change to take place. Profound resistances to experiencing, expressing, and understanding emotions are present in group members, the group as a whole, and the group therapist. Reasons for the three types of resistances are described. Specific therapist attitudes and therapeutic techniques are suggested to understand and effectively work through resistances at individual, interpersonal, and whole-group levels. Examples are given from an ongoing therapy group to illustrate the processes of understanding and working through resistances. Resistances on the part of the group therapist are identified and their possible effects on the group's resistance are explored.

Although ample evidence has supported the fact that emotional insight is necessary for change, creating the group conditions that foster such insight continues to be a challenge for the group therapist. In order for the therapy group to provide the conditions for change, the group therapist must be able to work effectively with the powerful resistances to experiencing, expressing, and understanding emotions (Alonso & Rutan, 1993; Greenberg & Safran, 1987; Yalom, 1995).

A second and equally important reason for the necessity of the group therapist to be able to work effectively in the emotional realm is that many people seeking therapeutic treatment have great difficulty experiencing the full range of emotions. They also experience difficulty expressing emotions appropriately and using awareness of emotions to make

Suzanne L. Cohen is Clinical Instructor in Psychology, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, and is in private practice in Wellesley, MA.

appropriate decisions about behavior (Greenberg & Safran, 1987; Swiller, 1988). As Elvin Semrad so simply and eloquently stated, "First feelings have to be acknowledged, then one has to bear them, and finally one has to decide what to do with them" (Rako & Mazer, 1983, p. 30). It is essential for the group therapist to understand the sources of resistances in order to help group members feel, express, and understand their emotions. The adaptive spiral of interpersonal learning (Yalom, 1995) is set in motion by emotional experiences in an interpersonal context. Group members try out new behaviors as they integrate their emotional experiences with cognitive understanding.

In this article resistances are defined as those forces that interfere with the group members' therapeutic progress and oppose the individual's and group's movement toward health (Greenson, 1967; Stark, 1994). The effectiveness of group therapy depends largely on the group's ability to work through these resistances so that learning can take place on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral levels (McCallum, Piper, & Morin, 1993; Ormont, 1993).

Although theorists have attempted to make distinctions among the terms "emotions," "feelings," and "affects," consensus has not been reached about the operational definitions of each of these terms (Basch, 1991; Tomkins, 1962; Lazarus, 1991). In this article, therefore, these terms will be used interchangeably. Emotions (feelings, affects) are defined as complex, patterned organismic reactions that express personal meaning and "combine, motivational, cognitive, adaptational, and physiological processes into a single complex state" (Lazarus, 1991, p. 6).

An article that focuses on emotions runs the risk of overemphasizing the emotional work and underemphasizing the cognitive work done by the group. Change occurs as a result of the integration of emotions, cognitions, and behavior. Neither emotional nor cognitive understanding alone leads to change. Although this article emphasizes the emotional work that needs to be done, and that is resisted, each of the aspects of resistance are understood and worked through by bringing thoughts and feelings together.

RESISTANCES TO EXPERIENCING EMOTIONS

Resistances to experiencing emotions fall into two broad categories: intrapsychic and sociocultural. A major intrapsychic resistance to experiencing emotions is the need to avoid pain, indicative of our evolutionary and biological heritage. Pain is avoided, pleasure is sought. Some emotions are painful to experience. Resistance to experiencing emotions is most powerful in response to intense or profound painful feelings. Negative emotions that patients work hard to avoid include fear, shame, and guilt. Further, experiencing feelings in the present often triggers painful memories from the past. The group member represses feeling in order to keep memories from coming to the surface of consciousness.

Feelings of vulnerability and defenselessness represent an additional source of intrapsychic resistance to experiencing emotion. Emotions are experienced as a distraction from being able to think and solve problems effectively. The resultant imbalance and discomfort leads to a feeling of vulnerability and an inability to think clearly. Additionally, anxiety over loss of control of emotions leads to a fear of damage or destruction of the self. Fears of this type result in emotional constriction (Freud, 1936). The degree of ego strength often determines the degree of feared defenselessness; that is, those with a greater degree of ego strength can more comfortably experience feelings, those with a lesser degree of ego strength fear damage or disintegration and have low tolerance for experiencing feelings.

The sociocultural impact on resistance to emotions is relevant here. There are prescriptions and prohibitions regarding emotions in general and specific emotions in particular in our culture. Children are socialized to control, suppress, or hide emotions that are considered to be bad, weak, shameful, or out of control (Miller, 1981). Kushner (1986) explains that our Judeo–Christian heritage teaches us to suppress feelings because of their close link to the instincts of paganism. Guilt, shame, and fear of damnation are used to control large numbers of people in some religions. Four of the "cardinal sins" are the emotions anger, pride, lust, and envy. In Western cultures emotional health has been synonymous with control of emotions. According to those mores, the mature adult makes decisions based on logic and rationality, not on emotions.

WORKING THROUGH RESISTANCES TO EXPERIENCING EMOTIONS

In order to work through resistance to experiencing emotions, the group members must experience feelings at a level of arousal wherein feelings are undeniable, but not to the extent that the group member is overwhelmed by them. How can this delicate balance be achieved? First the

group leader helps the group to develop a culture that is conducive to such a task. Such a group culture provides the environment necessary for the group members to recognize and bear painful feelings. Positive therapeutic norms established as the group is forming provide the foundation of safety for the members (Yalom, 1995). When such norms have been firmly established, the group members have a commitment to one another, strive for empathic resonance among themselves and with the leader, and value individuality and self-expression over conformity. This empathic milieu, which includes working through empathic failures, conflicts, and disappointments, allows the group members to bear painful emotions (Harwood, 1983). The group therapist develops this culture through modeling acceptance and empathic attunement, managing time and space boundaries, contracting with group members (an essential aspect of group preparation), and setting appropriate limits on behaviors that would be destructive to a secure group culture.

The developmental stage of the group is another important variable in intensifying emotions so that they can be experienced optimally. Intensifying affect is successful and meets with the least resistance after the group completes its initial stage of development, when safety has been established and there is a cohesive group atmosphere. If such intensifying is done before this developmental stage is reached, there may be increased anxiety or individual group members may feel pushed before they are ready.

The group leader, therefore, works to intensify the emotions of group members commensurate with their capacity to bear them. The leader, by having at his or her fingertips emotional language rich with words that express every emotion in the full range, from the mildest to the most intense, can help group members to experience feelings at varying comfort levels. For example, the group leader can assist a group member who is constricted and fears being overwhelmed by his/her feelings by helping him/her express the mildest irritation ("You sound a little bit annoyed") or by using the impersonal third person ("It's so sad"). The group leader may help another member who feels and can tolerate more intensity by suggesting, "You are furious." For the group member who needs help finding words to describe his emotions, the group leader can offer possibilities to choose from ("Are you irritated, or annoyed, or uncomfortable?"). The leader can also repeat the feeling word used by the group member or can ask the group member to repeat it (Gendlin, 1974; Greenberg & Safran, 1987; Greenson, 1965).

When the group is vague or too general in its exploration of an emotionally charged experience, the group leader can intensify and focus affect by eliciting details. In the following example, a group member was only able to feel rage toward her mother. She was unable to recall memories of her mother, nor could she experience her longings or sadness in relation to her mother. The therapist asked detailed questions about the group member's memory of her mother, including her hair color, the type of clothes she wore, what she cooked for dinner, how she was perceived by her coworkers, what she did for pleasure, and what she was like when the patient arrived home from school. The group member was able to respond to each question with details of her mother and eventually was able to experience feelings of respect and appreciation, as well as sadness over her unmet needs.

This process, which took place over several sessions, allowed the group member to move forward in her work. The examples that follow are from an ongoing psychotherapy group of four women and three men who are between the ages of 28 and 50. Members are Caucasian, college educated, and have a moderate to high level of ego functioning. Members have all had or are currently in individual psychotherapy and have the capacity for insight. These group members have been working together for 3 years. The group has reached a comfortable working stage and has achieved cohesiveness.

Case Example

The following example illustrates several types of intensification of emotional experiencing. The therapist elicits details, uses empathic resonance, and attends to nonverbal behaviors. Steve was referred to the group after two years of individual and couple therapy. Although he gained intellectual understanding of the sources of his anxiety he remained stuck and unable to move on in his life. He was emotionally constricted and had few skills in expressing his emotions effectively.

Steve had missed a group meeting to attend a funeral. On his return, he told the group that his Uncle Harry had died. He described the funeral in a detached and unfeeling manner. The group members and leader asked Steve for more of the details of the funeral and asked him to reminisce about his uncle. What were the particular experiences with his uncle that affected him most? Steve's defenses softened as he recounted a story of his uncle's supportive gestures during adolescence. Steve began to cry softly when the leader asked, with a low and empathic tone, "What will you miss most about Uncle Harry?" As he recounted the ways in which his uncle showed his love and caring, Steve tearfully expressed his love for his uncle and his grief over the loss.

At the next group session Steve expressed his appreciation to the group for

being accepting and allowing him to cry. He had expected to be humiliated and was relieved that the group was empathic with him. Steve's response suggests that the level and degree of emotion was tolerable to him. The group's acceptance of his feelings suggests that the level of intensity was in keeping with their tolerance level, as well.

Another example from this group illustrates working on an affective level in the here and now. Every group therapist has experienced the frustration of working with a group that does not or cannot work in the here and now. Ormont (1993) and Yalom (1995) are the most vocal proponents of the importance of the group working in the immediate present. They each believe that therapeutic change cannot take place without this type of work. In their writing they provide excellent guidance in techniques to assist the therapist in working in the immediate present. From the perspective of this article, the leader most effectively brings the group into the here and now by consistently focusing on the *affective* experiences of the group members. The following example illustrates the leader's activity toward keeping the group in the here and now.

Case Example

Over several months in each group meeting Steve complained about his ex-wife. He would obsess about why she had left him. Steve was unable to stay in the here and now, nor could he see how the interactions with group members could be relevant to his relationships outside the group. He persisted for many weeks in keeping the material focused away from the group and on his failed marriage. A shift took place after the leader brought the material consistently into the here and now. During every session, she asked the group members how they felt as they listened to Steve. She wondered out loud whether the same problem was occurring in the group as had occurred in Steve's marriage. She observed and commented on her observations that group members were expressing feelings nonverbally but not directly, noting eye rolling, yawning, and averting their gazes. In response to these interventions the group members verbally expressed feelings of irritation and frustration. Some said they were bored and that Steve was wasting the group's time. Steve felt hurt and injured by their feelings of frustration; he felt misunderstood, and withdrew sullenly. The group leader noted that there was a clear, parallel process between the dynamics in the group and in the marriage. The group's reactions were similar to those of Steve's ex-wife; Steve reacted to her in the same way he reacted to the group. Steve began to see the parallels.

Continued working through of these interactions over many weeks and months led to a deepening of the subjective experiences for both Steve and the group. This exploration led to Steve's realizing how anxious he was in relation to his wife and how fearful he was of her and the group's disapproval of him.

Subsequently he was able to connect his cognitive understanding with his fear and anxiety in childhood at the possibility that his mother might disapprove and then reject him. For the first time he remembered with affect painful interactions from his early childhood when his mother was harsh and disapproving of him. He was able to see that he tried to control his wife and group members by prolonged intellectualized lectures in an attempt to ward off his anxiety over anticipated criticism and disapproval.

Individual group members' character defenses present the group therapist with another area of resistance to experiencing emotions. Exploration of character defenses in the group provides a deeper understanding of the origins of fear, anxiety, and shame. Often defenses themselves provide clues as to what is being kept from awareness. Greenberg and Safran (1987) suggest that secondary or reactive emotions are distinct from the primary emotions of sadness, anger, fear, and joy. Secondary emotions are complex states such as hopelessness, boredom, and emptiness; they are often experienced as "bad feelings." Using techniques that help to intensify emotions will not lead to change of these states, but rather may serve to amplify or to deepen an emotional state that is highly maladapative. Such feelings must be explored for their defensive purposes and meanings. When feelings of hopelessness are expressed, for example, they may represent an attempt to ward off the pain of primary emotions. Alternatively they may be a way, albeit maladaptive, that the group member has learned to keep distance because closeness is anxiety provoking. When meanings on multiple levels are discovered, the maladaptive emotion shifts and new learning takes place.

By exploring such maladaptive feelings at individual, interpersonal, and whole-group levels, the group therapist provides the opportunity for such feelings to be understood in all their complexity. The following process describes the sequence of events of such an exploration. First the feeling must be identified as maladaptive. Such feelings are usually repetitive attempts to push away or distance, have a stuck quality, evoke frustration in other group members, and have a help-rejecting component. When these emotions are expressed there is no beneficial catharsis; rather, the group member feels worse. Once the feeling is identified as maladaptive, the therapist explores the meanings of the feeling for the individual group member, asks others to respond by telling the group member how they react to the expression of the feeling, and finally explores the meaning for the group; that is, what the group member may

be expressing for the group. The following example illustrates this process.

Case Example

A group member, Alan, expressed profound hopelessness during the last five minutes of every group meeting over a number of weeks, "Group therapy does not help me . . . nothing helps me . . . I don't know why I keep coming back." Empathy with this feeling only led to a deepening of Alan's despair. The leader wondered about the fact that this feeling was expressed during the last five minutes of each session. She suggested that perhaps this had something to do with Alan's feelings about the group being over and everyone leaving until the next week. This interpretation was based on Alan's fears of abandonment and intense separation anxiety, which he had previously discussed in the group. Once the meanings for Alan began to be uncovered, the group leader asked the group members about their reactions to Alan's expression of hopelessness. They told him that they felt pushed away and frustrated; they also felt hurt and devalued, unable to be of help. As these interactions began to illuminate the interpersonal meaning of Alan's hopelessness, the leader asked about whether others felt the same feelings, and whether Alan was expressing hopelessness for others, so that they would not have to acknowledge it in themselves.

The above process took place over a series of sessions, and each of the interventions overlapped and influenced the others. Alan's hopelessness and despair became a part of his membership in the group, was no longer split off, and lessened in intensity. He began to be able to observe the feeling in himself and to wonder about its meanings. Hopelessness as a way of distancing was explored by the group and opened up the possibility for new learning. Alan felt less isolated and lonely in the group as he was joined by others in exploring these feelings.

RESISTANCE TO EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Group members resist expressing emotions primarily to avoid feared negative interpersonal consequences and subsequent injury to self-esteem (Butler & Strupp, 1991). The most common of these negative consequences are fears of being rejected, being shamed or humiliated, being ignored or treated as if invisible, being criticized, and being punished or abused. Group members are usually unaware of their feared interpersonal consequences. Anxiety is free floating or is defended against with attitudes that represent the opposite. The shame-prone group member feels disdain and contempt toward others (Morrison, 1989). The group member who fears criticism is critical and judmental. The group member who feels invisible is so self-absorbed that other

group members feel that they are invisible to her or him. A first step for many is to be able to identify the specific fear as it manifests itself in the group. A turning point in treatment for some group members is the acknowledgment of these fears.

WORKING THROUGH RESISTANCES TO EXPRESSING EMOTIONS

Working through resistances to expressing emotions occurs when the group puts feelings into words rather than acting on them. One form of acting out in the group setting is nonverbal behavior for which the group members do not take responsibility. The group leader assists the group in transforming action into words by being vigilant in noticing nonverbal behaviors and using those observations to help the group be more aware of how they are expressing their feelings indirectly, covertly, or passively. The leader must strive to be nonjudgmental in his observations and must use appropriate timing so as not to injure or increase anxiety and defensiveness.

Another type of resistance to expressing feelings occurs when there is groupwide resistance to the group task. Groupwide resistances are indicated when the group seems to be stuck and no work takes place. At times the group may be flat and intellectualized; at other times a cheerful atmosphere prevails. The following groupwide behaviors suggest group resistance to experiencing and/or expressing emotions: telling stories of events outside of the group with no accompanying emotion, long silences, dry or colorless interactions, repeated conflicts that do not seem to progress, arguing, giving advice, and extended periods of friendly chitchat.

Groupwide resistances are best dealt with by interpretations to the group as a whole. In order to enhance the emotional component of these interventions, the group leader makes whole-group interpretations and clarifications that integrate emotional content and cognitive explanation. Such interpretations invite the group members to become aware of the ways in which they are avoiding or inhibiting emotional expression as a group.

Case Example

An example of this type occurred in the group at the time that two new members joined. Several weeks later the group began in silence for 15 minutes. Eventually a group member dutifully started a discussion with content that was intellectual-

ized and dry. This was a temporary rescue of the group. The group leader was surprised by the intensity of the group's resistance. When the next group meeting began with an extended period of silence, she wondered out loud what might be contributing to the silence. Her question was met with more silence. She began to sense that the group members were frightened and did not feel safe. She said, "I wonder if people are silent because it doesn't feel safe to talk." This question was met with nods of agreement. Group members now spoke of their fear of the new members, whom they perceived as negative and judgmental about the group. The newest member felt that the group was unfriendly and judgmental of him. The group explored their feelings about being judged and their tendency to withdraw to protect themselves from attack. They talked about times in their lives when they were ridiculed and humiliated in a public setting. They explored their projections of each other as strangers who might be hurtful and dangerous. Because of the new members, the group reverted back to an earlier stage of development. Work then took place to reestablish safety in the newly formed group.

RESISTANCE TO UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

A third type of resistance is the resistance to establishing the meanings underlying emotional experience. Fears include: giving up long-cherished defenses, increased vulnerability, emptiness as a result of the loss of an important part of identity, and being controlled by the therapist who is perceived to be ferreting out "hidden meanings." Some group members feel angry when asked to work at understanding the reasons for their emotional reactions and wish to keep childlike attitudes without having to do the difficult work of understanding the reasons behind them. For these group members, understanding may mean renunciation of wishes from unresolved conflicts dating back to childhood. Further, the group member may wish to avoid the responsibility resulting from understanding the reasons for his actions.

WORKING THROUGH RESISTANCES TO UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

The group leader provides containment through clarifications and interpretations that integrate thinking and feeling. He or she brings more cognitive understanding to bear when emotional flooding threatens the ego of a member or the group as a whole. Some group members become flooded, are impulsive, act out, and test or stretch the limits of the contract. Such patients would rather act than understand and use such action as a resistance to understanding (Stark, 1994).

Case Example

A series of interactions that took place in the group illustrates this type of interpretation. Pam and Beth often became overwhelmed with rage at one another. Beth frequently left the group for 10 minutes to calm down, the only way she could control herself. The group became very frightened when Beth went into a rage. They literally and figuratively looked to the leader for help in containing her. The leader's authority was required when Beth got close to losing control.

The group leader offered an interpretation that was based on her understanding of both group members' histories. She said, "Pam and Beth are living out their relationships with their mothers with each other. Sometimes Pam is the mother and sometimes Beth is the mother. They want to be cared about and accepted by one another, but they are afraid to trust one another because they each have been hurt so badly by their mothers." This interpretation had a calming and containing effect on the whole group. In addition, it released feelings of sadness and longing, which both group members defended against experiencing. The interpretation, made in different ways on a number of occasions, was cognitive but at the same time close to the emotions experienced by Pam and Beth (Basch, 1985). It could be used by Pam, Beth, and the group members to bring some cognitive control to the overwhelming emotions. Once the emotions were within a tolerable range, they could be expressed appropriately and the work could continue.

Another form of resistance to understanding emotions is in evidence when the group shows no interest in the past. It is as if group members never had a childhood or parents who caused them pain. Some group members have no memory of the past or remember events with no emotional content. In order to work through this type of resistance, the group leader helps the group to connect the present with the past by linking the emotions of the present with memories from the past. Insight on both cognitive and emotional levels results.

A third form of resistance to understanding takes place when the group members judge the appropriateness of feelings and are intolerant of differences. They judge rather than strive to understand. The group attempts to reject or scapegoat a member whose reactions appear to be "inappropriate." There is an attempt to shame the group member who may be "out of sync" with everyone else. This type of resistance occurs when "political correctness" is a value of some of the members. In truth, members are threatened by difference and try to bring all the group members into comfortable conformity.

The group leader must be vigilant to this type of resistance because it can be destructive to individuals and to the group as a whole. The group

leader assumes that each group member experiences the group uniquely even when emotional reactions seem inappropriate or bizarre. He or she helps the group to understand the complexity of those reactions that seem irrational. An example follows from the group.

Case Example

Sarah came to the group with a long history of highly conflicted relationships that ended poorly. These included relationships with therapists, work supervisors, parents, and friends. She was argumentative, pressured, and anxious in the group. Her emotional reactions were often exactly the opposite of what the group expected in a given circumstance. For example, when someone was vulnerable and openly hurting, Sarah felt angry and judgmental toward them. In other circumstances, when the leader spoke to another group member about her sadness, Sarah felt angry at the leader for "rubbing salt in the wound." This type of group member often becomes the scapegoat for the group unless there can be an open and nonjudgmental attitude of curiosiy about his or her experience.

In this case the group leader remained open and curious about Sarah's feelings and modeled this stance for the group. Based on Sarah's history, the leader wondered whether Sarah's mother and father were not adequately attuned to Sarah's feelings, and shamed her into denying her feelings. Perhaps Sarah felt angry when she saw someone in the group receive what she had been deprived of by her parents. Sarah was reenacting the frustrated and misunderstood child of the past. As this interpretation was accepted, Sarah became more curious about how she might be reenacting her early family life in the group.

THE GROUP THERAPIST'S RESISTANCES TO EMOTIONS

Just as group members have resistances to experiencing, expressing, and understanding emotions, so too does the group therapist. Group therapists differ in their tolerance of affect in themselves, may be uncomfortable with particular emotions, or with intensity of emotional experience. Such resistance is an example of subjective countertransference; that is, it does not arise in response to the group but exists in the therapist independent of the group (Ormont, 1991; Tansey & Burke, 1989).

An example of a therapist's resistance to experiencing a particular affect occured in a group therapist who was uncomfortable with feelings of shame. He protected himself from such feelings by covertly discouraging the group from criticizing, confronting, or expressing disappointment in him. He redirected the group or the group members away from negative feelings toward him and set limits on the free expression of anger or disappointment. This type of resistance to emotional experiencing in the therapist kept the group from fully developing affectively and cognitively. The group became overly compliant and "too good." Because the group could not navigate effectively through the conflict stage of the group's development, it remained dependent on the leader. The group's resistance reflected the therapist's resistance to experiencing shame.

Therapist resistance to emotional expression can best be understood in the context of therapist transparency and self-disclosure. Decisions about therapist transparency and self-disclosure, as well as decisions about expressing emotions to the group, require sound clinical judgment. Such decisions must be made according to the needs of the group and the group members (Rutan & Stone, 1993). Because a full discussion of therapist transparency is beyond the scope of this article, the reader may refer to Rutan and Stone (1993) and Wachtel (1993) for two approaches to therapist transparency.

Expressing emotions can take the form of sharing with the group one's own emotional experiences as they occur during the group, or can take the form of expressing feelings themselves. An example of the former would be when the therapist shares with the group his or her feeling of disconnection from the group and what it may mean about the group at that time. Examples of the latter include when the group leader becomes tearful when a member leaves the group, when he or she laughs heartily at a funny moment, and when he or she reddens when embarrassed.

The therapist's resistance to expressing emotions parallels that of the group members. The leader fears being rejected, criticized, judged, or ridiculed. He or she may fear losing control. When a therapist is predominantly unexpressive, the group perceives him or her as cold, distant, unfeeling, or uncaring. Such lack of expressiveness may dovetail with the group's resistance to emotional expression.

The therapist with resistance to understanding emotions finds gratification in the group's freely expressing affect and discourages understanding. He or she deems it "intellectualizing." The group takes on a "free-for-all" atmosphere. The group's resistance to bringing cognitive understanding to bear will not be worked through. Reenactments of traumatic childhood experiences occur but are not understood. Interpersonal learning is sharply curtailed, as the group members do not have the opportunity to understand the origins of their conflicts, or the ways in which they are repeating maladaptive patterns of behavior.

WORKING THROUGH THE THERAPIST'S RESISTANCE

In reality, each group therapist has some degree of resistance to each of the components: experience, expression, and understanding. It rests on the therapist to work continuously on countertransference and resistances, and to use consultation when such resistances are leading either to a lack of effectiveness or to destructive or unhealthy group norms. By becoming aware, through self-analysis and consultation, the group therapist better understands the sources of his or her own resistances and the ways in which the therapist's resistance dovetails with the group's (Tansey & Burke, 1989). The group itself can be a rich source of information if the leader is open to listening and allowing the group to provide him or her with feedback about his or her blind spots (Ormont, 1991). Self-analysis on the part of the group therapist, if it is an ongoing process, will keep negative consequences of his or her resistance to a minimum.

CONCLUSIONS

The field of emotions is expanding rapidly in both academic and applied psychology. Greenberg and Safran (1987) describe affect as "a multifaceted, multidimensional information system" (p. 301). They further elaborate on the combination of sensations, cognitions, feelings, values, behaviors, evaluations, and perceptions that constitute an affective experience. The challenge to the group therapist is to be open to the complexity of emotions and to bring this understanding to bear in the practice of group therapy.

Differentiation between those emotions that are adaptive and those that are maladaptive is an important area for further study. Group therapy may be the ideal learning environment to help patients with entrenched and rigid maladaptive emotions, such as hopelessness, emptiness, and rage, because they can be observed at the three levels of meaning—intrapsychic, interpersonal, and group as a whole.

Further study is needed in understanding how the group therapist's resistances influence the group process, and how self-analysis, supervision, and consultation can help the group leader work through subjective countertransference reactions to emotional experiencing, expressing, and understanding.

REFERENCES

Alonso, A., & Rutan, J. (1993). Character change in group therapy. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 43*, 439–451.

Basch, M. F. (1985). Interpretation: Toward a developmental model. In A. Goldberg (Ed.), *Progress in self-psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 33–42). New York: Guilford Press.

Basch, M. F. (1991). The significance of a theory of affect for psychoanalytic technique. In T. Shapiro & R. N. Emde (Eds.), *Affect: Psychoanalytic perspectives* (pp. 291–304). Madison, CT: International Universities Press.

Butler, S. F., & Strupp, H. H. (1991). The role of affect in time-limited dynamic psychotherapy. In J. D. Safran & L. S. Greenberg (Eds.), *Emotion, psychotherapy, and change* (pp. 83–112). New York: Guilford Press.

Freud, A. (1936). *The ego and the mechanisms of defense.* New York: International Universities Press.

Gendlin, E. (1974). Client-centered and experiential psychotherapy. In D. A. Wexler & L. N. Rice (Eds.), *Innovations in client-centered therapy* (pp. 211–246). New York: Wiley.

Greenberg, L., & Safran, J. (1987). *Emotion in psychotherapy.* New York: Guilford Press.

Greenson, R. (1967). *The technique and practice of psychoanalysis.* New York: International Universities Press.

Harwood, I. (1983). The application of self-psychology concepts to group psychotherapy. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 33*, 469–487.

Kushner, H. (1986). *When all you've ever wanted isn't enough.* New York: Summit Books.

Miller, A. (1981). *The drama of the gifted child.* New York: Basic Books.

McCallum, M., Piper, W., & Morin, H. (1993). Affect and outcome in short-term group therapy for loss. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 43*, 303–319.

Morrison, A. P. (1989). *Shame: The underside of narcissism.* Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.

Ormont, L. (1991). Use of the group in resolving the subjective countertransference. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 41*, 433–447.

Ormont, L. (1993). Resolving resistances to immediacy in the group setting. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 43*, 399–418.

Rako, S. R., & Mazer, H. (Eds.). (1983). *Semrad, the heart of a therapist.* New York: Jason Aronson.

Rutan, J. S., & Stone, W. (1993). *Psychodynamic group psychotherapy* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Stark, M. (1994). *A primer on working with resistance.* Northville, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Swiller, H. I. (1988). Alexythymia: Treatment utilizing combined individual and group psychotherapy. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 38*, 47–61.

Tansey, M. J., & Burke, W. F. (1989). *Understanding countertransference: From projective identification to empathy.* Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.

Tomkins, S. S. (1962). *Affect, imagery, and consciousness* (Vols. 1–2). New York: Springer.
Wachtel, P. (1993). *Therapeutic communication*. New York: Guilford Press.
Yalom, I. D. (1995). *Theory and practice of group psychotherapy* (4th ed.). New York: Basic Books.

Suzanne L. Cohen, Ed.D.
One Hollis Street, Suite B-5
Wellesley, MS 02181

Received: September 26, 1996
Revision received: January 13, 1997
Accepted: January 17, 1997