

APPENDIX E

TYPICAL ISSUES IN GROUP COUNSELING

Questions and Answers about Common Group Issues

The following edited protocol involves us sharing our personal, clinical insights into a number of group issues with a group of graduate students in group counseling.

Question: Dr. Landreth, what differences do you see between the role of the counselor in a group setting and a counselor in an individual setting?

Landreth: That's a good question to start with. It is basic to what we do in group counseling and one that I have pondered for myself. First, let me focus on myself. I see myself being different in a group. I am not sure just why I am. Some of the same basic skills are necessary in both settings, but I feel more personally free in the group, free to express myself, free to risk in some areas that I would never risk in or have not in individual counseling. Take touching, for instance. I cannot recall having touched a client in the middle of an individual counseling session. Although I have felt an inclination to do that, I'm not sure just why I haven't. But in group counseling, I do feel more comfortable in getting up and going across the circle and hugging a group member and have done that. Not that I do that in every session, but I have done that in some.

Berg: In addition to the personal freedom that Garry is talking about, the group leader needs to be aware of several more dimensions than is required of an individual counselor. The group leader takes some responsibility for the entire group as well as the individual of focus. That requires a special kind of attending and a certain knowledge about groups of people and how they respond to one another. The leader should be aware of the impact of an individual's disclosure on other members of the group and how they might respond. The group leader can't be completely responsible for all of those things, but being aware of them is important. In a group, there's always a lot going on at any specific time.

Fall: The biggest difference I notice is the way I process information and connect with the client. In individual [counseling], the connection is between me and the client. For example, if you are spinning plates, in individual counseling, there is only one plate to spin and the only one facilitating the spinning is the counselor. In group, there are many plates [members], and I have to focus on the speed and balance of each plate in order to maintain the process. In group [counseling], another dynamic takes place, that being the influence of the members on one another's growth. In individual, the counselor is the primary change agent. In group, the leader must be skilled at incorporating all the members into the push for change.

Landreth: One of the things I have noticed that's different about me in group counseling is that in individual counseling, I'm very conscious of the member's feelings right off

and have a tendency to respond most to these feelings, whereas in the first session of group counseling, my tendency is to react more to the interactions that are occurring, helping members to get in, and linking members together. So, as a result of that, I'm sure I spend less of my time in the first session focusing on individual feelings, although I have a natural inclination to do that. I have noticed as we have worked together, Bob, you spend more time initially focusing on the individual, and I spend more time helping the members to engage in the interaction process.

Berg: That may not be a function of individual style as much as it may be you and I working together. I think that over the twenty-some years that you and I have been leading groups together, we have come to know each other, what to expect from each other, and the result is a natural balance.

Question: Why do so many successful, well-trained individual counselors find it difficult to make the transition to group work?

Berg: My speculation is that many good individual therapists do not always feel comfortable in a group setting, and one of the reasons for that may be that they haven't had enough experience in a group. Group settings are more difficult to control than individual settings, and whether we like it or not, therapists like to be in control. Also, therapists who chose to do group work tend to be slightly more expressive, risk-taking personalities.

Fall: I was "well trained" in group and had difficulty getting motivated to set up groups in my practice setting. The primary obstacle for me was that groups seem to be more difficult to create than making individual client appointments. With group, there is more planning, marketing, and finding a good time and enough clients to make the group. The logistical barrier was huge for me. However, once I got started, I found groups to be much easier to maintain than individual clients.

Landreth: Some counselors are just not comfortable in a group setting. That's also true of members. Not everyone should be in group. Some people work better as a client in individual counseling. The same holds true for counselors. Some counselors work better with individuals than with groups. I think one possible reason for this has to do with the dimension of risk. If the counselor has very little need for control, that person is probably more tolerant of ambiguity and will have less need to know exactly where the group is going and how the experience is going to end. That kind of person will probably be more comfortable in the group.

Question: What do I do if there is a long silence in the group and I'm the group leader?

Landreth: That experience probably plagues the beginning group leader more than anything else that can happen in a group because most group leaders want something to be happening. The tendency is to assume that not much is going on if there is no verbal communication. If there is anything I have learned from working in groups, it's to be comfortable with silence. Just because there are no words being used doesn't mean there's no work. I think one of the things a skilled group counselor needs to do is to be able to distinguish between the working silence and a silence that is not really productive. I don't know how to describe that. When I sense or feel a silence is being productive, I am just comfortable with it. Then there are other silences where I feel not much is going on, and I feel comfortable to break that silence. I think one of the worst things that can happen to beginning group counselors is to get caught in the game of "Who's going to break the silence first?" That can be deadly because the group leader is sitting there determined not to break the silence, and there is a

point where the group will not break the silence either and the leader may need to intervene. So the group leader needs to be sensitive to the group, sensitive to whether there is work going on, and then to be patient with silences that do occur.

Berg: There are different kinds of silences. One might be a resistant silence. If in the life of the group the group leader senses, and I use that word “sense” because we do so much of that, if the leader senses a resistance in a silence, I think the best thing the leader can do is to go back to the group as a whole and ask them to examine the silence, to take a look at themselves and their own behavior and what might be underlying the resistance.

Fall: Silence is often more disturbing to the leader than it is for the members. I often time the silence and ask the leader how long they thought it lasted. Invariably, the leader overestimates the duration. It is a real skill to learn to be comfortable with silence. If you can’t develop a general level of comfort, then it will be much more difficult to tell the difference between productive and unproductive silences.

Landreth: Also, I think there is a tendency on the part of group leaders to think, “Whatever happens here is up to me,” and so if there is a silence, it is up to the leader to do something. I feel comfortable in letting the group decide what to do with the silence. It’s not always up to me. They can decide what to do next and maybe learn something in the process about their responsibility in this group.

Question: How structured or active do you think the group counselor should be in the group?

Berg: In a group with relatively little experience, I find myself busier, more active verbally, more structured in the initial phases. My involvement tends to decrease as time goes by and members assume more responsibility for themselves and the direction of the group. I don’t favor a lot of prepackaged structure, other than ice-breakers at the beginning when people are anxious. Typically, I don’t use a lot of structured activities in the group. My reason is that there is *always* something going on in the group. An important thing I have learned about myself is to trust my ability to read or sense what is going on in the group at any given time. A good permission giver for that trust is to forgive myself when I’m wrong. I don’t mind making mistakes nearly as much as I might have at one time. If I can risk being wrong, it is a process that the group members can relate to. So I’m busier in the initial stages, modeling, and demonstrating to group members the types of responses I think are constructive and helpful. As I hear those words coming back to me from the group, I feel much more comfortable in sitting back and letting the group members help each other. Part of the learning, part of the group process, is for the members to learn not only to help themselves, but also to help others.

Landreth: Bob, one of the reasons we work so well together is that you focus on the modeling and helping members learn how to make helpful responses, while my initial tendency is to help the member get into the group and interact, thus to shift the responsibility to the group. In this process, members are really getting both sides, both ends of the continuum.

Fall: I think different types of groups call for different levels of structure. Psychoeducational and task groups naturally need more structure than counseling or psychotherapy groups. In counseling groups, I think structure is more appropriate in the beginning stages of group as a way to get the group started, but should taper off as the need [for] activity-based interaction is replaced with spontaneous connection and sharing.

Question: What do you feel is the optimal number of members per group?

Berg: Primarily, the groups I have in mind are process-oriented groups, and such groups function on the basis of several assumptions. One assumption is that the members are able to function in their lives and roles relatively well. They may run the range of normal to neurotic personality difficulties. Individuals who have personality problems or relationship difficulties serious enough to keep them from profiting from the group should be excluded. When group members are functioning interpersonally, at least minimally, the group leader can rely on group members helping each other, getting involved in the group process itself, learning from the process, and being a part of it. Interpersonal process groups tend to function best with seven to nine people in a group. If the group is much larger than that, people are not going to have the opportunity to get verbally involved in the process. If the group is smaller than that, there can be great pressure on people to contribute verbally. I don't like that.

Landreth: Groups for children in primary grades should have four or five members. For Grades 4, 5, and 6, probably about six members would be optimum for that age group.

Question: How do you get a cohesive group?

Landreth: My first reaction is that I don't know how to "get" a group to be cohesive. There are some things that I can do to contribute to a group becoming cohesive, but whether or not the group becomes cohesive is up to the group. A group leader may work as hard as he or she can, and the group may never become cohesive even though the leader is doing the same sort of things that he or she did in a group that became cohesive. I think the way I present myself initially contributes to the cohesiveness of a group. One of the things I have found about myself is that I can help people to feel safe with me or comfortable with me. I think that's because I feel comfortable with myself in that setting. Then, feeling safe and comfortable, they feel safe enough to risk saying something to me or other members or to reveal some part of their inner person. That's the beginning stage of moving toward cohesiveness. The crucial element, in addition to the sharing of self, is there must be interaction among the members. In groups where there is a focus on individual counseling in the group setting, it is almost impossible to develop cohesiveness because there is not interaction among group members. Members feel good about being there, but they don't have any sharing or interaction among themselves to make them a part of another person's life. I think interaction and sharing are crucial to the development of cohesion. When there is a feeling that I have been able to contribute in some way to your life, and you also have been able to contribute to my life, then a feeling of closeness develops and that is cohesion.

Berg: Cohesiveness is also related to the chemistry or makeup of the group. Some groups may never achieve true cohesiveness. Verbal participation is very important to the development of cohesion. There are some indicators that a group is becoming cohesive. Cohesiveness is a togetherness, a glue that keeps the group together. A cohesive group is one in which members assign priority to the life of the group itself. Attendance can indicate the level of cohesiveness of a group. In a cohesive group, people will attend and [will] miss other things to get there and be on time. Verbal interaction also tells you something about cohesiveness. How people begin to link themselves to other members' statements will tell you about cohesiveness. In a cohesive group, members tend to call each other and provide a support system during the week and will check on each other at the beginning of group session to see how things went during the week in relation to some person's problem. Also, some groups can become

too cohesive; therefore, cohesiveness is not something you strive for and maintain at all costs. If a group becomes too cohesive, the members may begin to protect and rescue each other. This is something the group leader must be sensitive to and guard against.

Question: What factors would you want to consider as a group leader when screening potential group members?

Berg: One of my primary screening criteria is that a person have some other satisfactory interpersonal relationship outside and exclusive of the group. That can be any kind of relationship—spousal, romantic, friendship, family—but the kind that is chosen and satisfactory to both people. I check that out rather carefully. Groups are so interpersonal that if a member doesn't have a historical base of minimal social skills, this has to be achieved in some way in the group. That can get pretty neurotic and not very helpful for other group members.

I prefer heterogeneous groups. I have never preferred groups focused around a single problem. I enjoy personality differences and diversity. I like to have some assertive members and some members who are more passive. There's much that can be learned from differences in people. An exception would be if there is a person whose problem area is so profound at any given point that they would demand or need a large amount of group time; I would probably suggest that person get individual or concurrent counseling rather than relying totally on the group.

Fall: For me, the pre-group interview is a great way to see how the person interacts with people. You are getting insight into how the person will be in your group. I also assess the person's expectations and goals for group to see if they match with the group's intent. I agree with Bob: I am not looking for a group of one type of person, or even "great group members." I want different combinations of people in my group. For group to work best, it really needs to reflect the real world as much as possible in terms of backgrounds and personality styles. Unless the group is designed specifically for one particular disorder, I will screen out severe psychopathology (personality disorders, psychotic disorders, untreated mood or anxiety disorders) based on the level of care that would be appropriate.

Landreth: Typically, more attention is focused on screening group members as we go up the age scale. Perhaps that is because children have fewer problems interacting than adults. I know they experience their world just as intensely as we do. Or it could be that they are more resilient and more adjustable and capable in interacting with their peers despite their problems. Another possibility is that they are more accepting of the differences that occur in people. I also prefer a heterogeneous group. I like the challenge of "Now that we are together, what can we create?" For that reason, I'm not as cautious about putting a certain type of group together. I think we should screen because there are certain members who don't work out well in a group. I prefer not to work in a group focused on one particular problem. However, one of the most exciting groups I've led was a group of teenage chronic traffic violators. Other than that initial similarity, though, they were a very diverse group, and we seldom focused on their driving habits.

Question: What type of training do you think is necessary to become a group counselor?

Fall: The Association for Specialists in Group Work and CACREP [Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, counseling's accrediting body] have developed a very detailed description of group-work training standards. One class

in group does not constitute complete training in my mind. I tend to rely on the triad of competency. The three elements include formal education, supervised clinical work, and continuing education.

Landreth: There are two experiences that are absolutely essential. One is that the group counselor be well read in the area of group counseling and have some formal training. However, the typical group-counseling course is not enough. It is essential that the group facilitator learn as much as can possibly be learned about himself or herself. In training, the group leader can learn skills to apply and certain things to do in specific situations, but when there is a real crisis in the group the ultimate tool the group leader has is his or her personality at that moment and the accompanying creativity and courage. How well these dimensions are utilized will depend on the group leader's acceptance of self. Therefore, I would recommend some personal group counseling. Perhaps from ten to fifteen group sessions that provide the potential group leader an opportunity to find out not only what it's like to be a member but also how other people react to him or her. If the group leader is not aware of how other people react to him, he will not be sensitive to how the group members see him. Most of all, the group leader must be open to learning about self from the group he leads. That does not mean I go into the group to work on my issues or focus on myself a lot, but secondarily in the learning experience to be open to learning about myself. Out of that comes a general presentation of self that others find helpful. One of the things that has been most helpful for me is to turn loose of the need to be helpful to everyone. There are some people who react to Bob in a positive way that would not react to me in that way.

Berg: Theory, techniques, and all the cognitive information we carry around [are] less important than who we are as persons. We need to understand human development, and we need to understand groups and how they work. We need to understand how people relate to each other, but the main thing we have going for us is how we utilize ourselves. So, in addition to experiencing group therapy, self-inspection must become an attitude, a way of life. I'm constantly amazed and sometimes scared about what I continue to learn about me, as far as how I relate to other people, how I see myself. The more I do that, the more I keep in touch with myself, and the more doors open for me. The payoff is that it's easier to be empathetic with others. To be more responsible for my own behavior helps me get outside of me and to be fully present with the group or with another person, wherever I am. This is not being self-obsessed. It's possible to be introspective without being self-obsessed.

Landreth: That process of introspection is one of happenings and learnings that aren't being looked for. It's like a discovery in the process of interacting in the group: "Look at that. Why am I feeling this? I wasn't aware of this in me," and then some self-awareness coming on the spot, maybe in the group.

Question: At what particular point would you terminate a participant in a group if the personality conflict gets to be really strong?

Landreth: There are basic guidelines. The individual is important. I will be sensitive to the individual. I do care about this person. I care about the individual more perhaps than the total group in terms of personal feeling. The individual is important, but not more important than the group, and the group is important, but not more than the individual. So it depends on whether the group is able to react in an appropriate way to that individual. If it seemed to me that the group, in terms of their reactions, was not handling a member very well, I feel very comfortable in removing a member.

I do it very gently and not abruptly in the middle of the session, but to talk with a member after the session about individual counseling, not continuing with the group at this time or perhaps individual counseling now and joining with another group at some point. I would never allow one member, I know that sounds like I'm in control and it's not all up to me, but I would not want to allow a member to destroy the group because I believe that the group is important too.

Berg: The bottom line is a clinical judgment. There are a few things that pop into my mind. One is when a person is so needy that they need to dominate group time or they just can't connect with other members of the group because everything in the group seems to remind them of their own problem. At that point, we need to ask the question "Is the group the best intervention system available for this particular person?" I don't have any qualms about saying to a person, "We may have made a mistake with regards to placement. Let's look at some other alternatives." If someone is very angry, whether they are aware of it or not, and that keeps popping out in the group, the group may not be the best place for that person. Oftentimes, it can be helpful to a group to learn to deal with conflict. But if it's a pervasive kind of thing and it goes on and on, that can become a problem. One of the problems with a person who is very different, by that I mean personality-wise quite different from the group norm, is that they can set themselves up as the scapegoat in the group. It's not helpful for the group members to find someone they can pick on and dump hostilities on. What typically happens is that it forces that person into a defensive posture that just perpetuates the problem. I don't view group as a panacea for the world's ills. In fact, in terms of intervention systems, I view groups as an adjunct, something people can profit from after they have done phase 1 individual work where they have taken care of their own intrapersonal dynamics. My preference would be that members of an adult group have had some individual counseling where they have looked at their primary relationships, examined their roots, looked at their history, and have a reasonably good handle on where they come from and why they behave in certain ways and are wanting to test out new ways of behaving in a social context.

Landreth: I'm less restrictive about who can join a group. In high school, junior high, and elementary school, where there may not be an opportunity for individual counseling, I would go ahead and put a group of children together without any concern about individual counseling unless there was a major emotional problem. Most children in public schools aren't going to be functioning in that setting very well if there is a major emotional problem. They will have already been removed and placed in a private school or diagnostic setting. Also, with adults, I feel free to take a group of people without delving too much into their background, other than some initial screening. If they have an eagerness to be in the group and to have that experience, I'll see how that works out and they can see how the group works out. As to the question about removing someone from the group, sometimes it is helpful to just call the person aside and discuss with them their own perception of how they are doing in the group or how the group is reacting to them. This may give them a chance to reveal their own apprehension about the group. They may reveal, without you even bringing it up, some other experience or a desire to not continue in the group. Or, if you're working with a long-term group, you may have the opportunity for a member to exit the group for three to four sessions, get some individual work, and be ready to come back into the group. I experienced that with a group of fifth-grade students. One little boy in the group, Erik, was the general of the school. He would strong-arm kids in the bathroom to get their lunch money. In the group, he was a physically active youngster,

so much so that there were times when I had to physically restrain him. He was just so physically aggressive the group members kept a physical distance. There just wasn't much cohesiveness evolving because he kept people separated. After five sessions, he was removed from the group and placed in individual counseling. His removal came as a result of his own decision. The group had established a rule that in the group, members had to sit in the circle if they wanted to stay in the group. Failure to do so meant the member could not stay in the group and would have to go back to the classroom. Erik chose not to sit in the circle, so he chose to go back to his classroom. When I left to escort him to the classroom, the group came together physically just like a group of quail huddling up. It was a dramatic portrayal of how they felt separated because of him. Three weeks later, after individual counseling twice a week, he was able to come back into the group and function.

Question: If the group was involuntary, what would you do to minimize this impact on the group? I work with juvenile delinquents, and there are four to five strong-armers in the group. How do you minimize these four to five for the remaining members?

Landreth: My inclination is to go the other way, to help the group members react rather than my reacting to the disruptive member. I want to help the group members to become strong enough, perhaps with my support, and I think that would be a very indirect form of support, for them to discover that they could cope with that person. I think there is always the potential that they can be just as strong as that person is in reacting to him. They can really discover that they don't have to give in.

Berg: I would agree. Part of the frustration in dealing with involuntary issues is that it will slow the process down. Working with juvenile delinquents can be very taxing. Part of the problem in working with groups that are involuntary, such as groups of offenders, is that they have similar skills available to them. That's typically what's gotten them in trouble in the first place. They don't perceive a lot of options, in terms of behavior. In a group like that, you would have to be patient and do more teaching, modeling, pointing out, confronting of behaviors that have not worked in the past. If such behaviors had worked, these members wouldn't be where they are now. Even in involuntary groups, the leader has the right to exit a person if that person is being totally disruptive in the group. Again, that's a decision the leader has to make about the welfare of this person, the welfare of the group, and the welfare of the entire system. Even in a prison setting, the leader can exit a person.

Landreth: One thing that bothers me about the question is the indication there is nothing that can be done, that the individuals must be in the group. My preference would be that there is some opportunity for the member to not be present if the member chooses by his behavior not to be here. The other individuals in the group are important also, as is the person causing so much trouble. Sometimes, there is a decision that needs to be made for the welfare of the group. Do we allow this one member to destroy the whole group week after week? I would like some opportunity to have the member sit one or more sessions out for a while if possible.

Fall: Those are good points. I have worked for over ten years with court-mandated group members. The first thing I try to do is make sure they know they have a choice in whether or not they attend group. This is vital. If they cannot find their choice in the process, then group becomes a power struggle, a consequence. What is their choice? Well, they can choose to come see me or they can go to jail, or whatever else the court wants to do with them. That's not much of a choice, but it's a start. If I can help

them see that choice from the beginning, then the foundation is laid to help them find other choices in the process. For example, the court says you have to be here, but you get to decide what you get out of the group. Also, if they can see the choice between group and jail, then when they do not abide by the rules of the group, it helps me frame their disruption as a choice to leave group (which means they are choosing jail).

Question: What would you consider a nonproductive session?

Berg: I could say there's no such thing. However, I have been bored in sessions. I have left groups feeling like I did not do as well as I would have liked to. I've left groups thinking that the group members did not do what I had hoped for them to do. My first answer is probably best. The second two probably have to do with my own need to be productive, my need to get somewhere. The more I can convince myself that individuals in groups will do what they need to do, the more I can let the river flow and certainly not try to push the river, then the more at peace and off the hook I'll feel. There is a theory in groups that if very little is going on, let the members sit that way until they get bored enough to go to work. I don't have a lot of that in me, though. At the same time, I do think the leader can take too much responsibility, and I believe that's a mistake. If a group decides to work, a group will come in one week and just work, work, work, and the leader will think, "That's terrific!" If they work like that every week, we're really going to get someplace. The next week, the group members go on vacation, and the leader may wonder if it's the same group. Those kinds of groups are OK with me.

Fall: *Productive* is a loaded word. Group is a process that flows, so it is very difficult to take one session and assess it without the whole. I have experiences [with] unproductive groups (as a whole), but even those have moments of movement. I have often found that my definition of *productive* is very different from my group members." I have also gotten great results from processing "bad" sessions. When I share my perceptions, I am amazed at the issues that emerge within the group. I actually look forward to slow parts of the process because it tends to act as a catalyst for the group.

Landreth: I have mixed reactions to that question because I have had some experiences where I went away from a session feeling, "This was a real bummer. Nothing happened," only to come back the next week and someone comes in, sits down, and says, "Last week was the most terrific session we've had. I learned so much about myself." I've had that happen many times, and I have concluded, for myself, that I can't evaluate whether it was a productive session for anyone else. Maybe it wasn't productive for me, but perhaps it was for someone else in the group. The reason I have mixed reactions is that there are typically some things that indicate the group is being productive. If there is sharing within the group, at a feeling level, and if individuals talk about themselves as opposed to activities, that does seem to be more productive. If the experience is one in which members personally react to each other and give feedback, we know that can be productive. We also know there are other experiences that perhaps we are not wise enough to discern that can be productive—as in a silence. There is a lot of work that can go on within a silence, and people can experience that as being a very productive time. I may sit there and not learn anything about myself during the silence and thus evaluate it as not very productive, but for someone else it may be a very productive time. My inclination is to try not to evaluate what is going on. And yet there is still a part of me that sometimes comes away from a group session saying, "This was a better session," or, "This was a session that seemed

to be productive,” or, “This was a session where we were struggling and I don’t think very much happened here.” So I still find myself making those kinds of evaluations in spite of the fact that I have learned otherwise.

Question: What special suggestions do you have for persons leading a group of people from multiracial backgrounds?

Berg: That is one thing I caution against for an inexperienced leader. Diversity groups can have tremendous potential benefit, but [are] not something recommended for a relatively inexperienced group leader. The group leader must first have general group counseling experience and a good acquaintance with the culture from which the members come. Cultural and ethnic differences make an enormous difference interpersonally.

Landreth: One of the reasons for this caution is such a group can be so volatile emotionally because of the members’ lack of understanding of each other’s cultural background. The members’ own experiences may trigger some emotional reaction, and it’s because of that potential volatile expression that the leader must be experienced.

Fall: ASGW has done a very nice job of developing the “Principles for Diversity-Competent Group Workers.” This set of guidelines helps new and seasoned group workers explore some important aspects of leading groups in a pluralistic society. I enjoy considering how one’s culture impacts the group’s cohesion. Every group is a multicultural group, and each member’s uniqueness has an opportunity to help the group grow and learn, or it can be an obstacle to growth. Honoring differences has long been a hallmark of group work, and so I try to get these issues out in the open as soon as possible.

Question: You briefly talked about resistance. Can you talk a little more about it: what you do, how you recognize it?

Berg: Silence is one of the primary and direct ways a group will exhibit resistance. Other ways are to ignore the deeper level of transactions and stay on surface topics, not directly deal with each other, and a reluctance to disclose oneself. I have a feeling, when I’m seeing those behaviors, that there is something wrong with the way in which we have dealt with the issues of purpose, commitment, and boundaries in the initial stages of the group. There are different ways to commit oneself to a group, but unless those issues are dealt with pretty specifically in the initial stages, at some time the group is going to hit bumps in the road. When the leader senses resistance, one of the best interventions is that the leader shares his feeling and/or reaction with the group. The leader could say, “Look, we don’t seem to be doing what we agreed on initially. Let’s look at why we’re here, what it is we want to accomplish, and why it seems so hard for us as a group to trust one another.” This will open up those issues for reexamination. I have found that the most resistances are related to safety and trust concerns at some level—either vague or specific. This is always a topic for examination.

Landreth: Resistance is not necessarily a negative thing. It may mean that the group is experiencing and exhibiting resistance because the members are aware that they are about to move into a deeper emotional period in the group. There may be some “getting ready” time that is necessary, and that time can be short-lived or long-lived depending on the group or how the leader reacts. So we don’t always view resistance as something negative. There are times when I have experienced a group doing what I call *working at not working*, which is resistance. It appears on the surface that things are going great in the group. There may be a lot of interaction, a lot of talk, a lot of sharing. But the interaction is talk about why the group is not doing what they would like to do, why they aren’t working, and what they need to do. Members go on and

on and on about what the group needs to do, and everyone has a clear idea about what the group needs to do, but they continue to talk about what the group needs to do and why the group isn't doing it. Sometimes, it helps for the leader to identify that. Perhaps the leader could say, "As I listen, it seems to me that, as a group, we are working real hard at not working." Just mentioning that may be enough for the members to shift. I think sometimes groups get caught up in the process of analyzing the group's behavior, or they get caught up in the topic of the moment, and even though it's not what they really want to do, it's as if they are going downhill, and they don't know how to stop or aren't aware they're going downhill, and someone needs to say, "Hold it. Are you aware of what's happening?" As Bob said, "Is this what you want to discuss or spend your time doing at the moment?" You have to be ready for an answer either way. If the leader opens that up and the group says, "Yes," then what does the leader do? That may be a real test of the leader's acceptance. The leader must allow the group to set their own direction and to struggle with the process of accomplishing what they want.

Summary

Some of the significant issues in group counseling have been dealt with in this chapter. A strong recommendation has been presented for the scheduling of some group-counseling sessions more frequently than once a week. The issue of structuring has been discussed as a potential means for contributing to the development of interaction in groups. In all groups, some degree of structuring is present. Silences in group counseling are especially perplexing to inexperienced group facilitators who often feel that something observable must be going on in the group at all times. We have presented silence as a natural and dynamic part of the interactional process in groups. Contracting for behavioral change has been presented as a possible procedure for enhancing group activity, productivity, and cohesiveness.

An edited protocol discussed some frequently asked questions concerning group process and possible problem areas. Specific answers focused on possible solutions and areas for consideration for the developing group counselor.

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