


Counseling Men in Groups



**Frederic E. Rabinowitz
Sam V. Cochran**

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Counseling Men in Groups

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Over the past decade a number of approaches to working with men in all-male groups have been described. Some of these approaches include consciousness-raising groups (Bradley, Danchik, Foger, & Wodetzki, 1971), structured and unstructured groups for increasing male awareness (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 1983; Washington, 1979), self-help and support groups (Wong, 1978), and all-male psychotherapy groups (Stein, 1982). The identification of issues unique to men has become more important as men initially reacted to the impact of feminism on their lives and later began to articulate issues related to gender-role strain and conflict. Many of these gender-role issues are described in the literature (Fasteau, 1974; Goldberg, 1976; O'Neill, 1981, 1982; Pleck & Sawyer, 1974) and provide some useful topics for men to address in their process of self-discovery. Since many of these issues are interpersonal in nature (e.g., intimacy, competition, anger, restrictive emotionality, power) the usefulness of all-male groups as an environment in which to address them has become increasingly apparent. The group becomes an interpersonal microcosm in which various male issues become manifest and available for study and modification (Yalom, 1975).

Stein (1982) has delineated the values, assumptions, and outcomes that membership in all-male groups represents. Some of these include representing a statement about nontraditional masculine values, providing an opportunity for men to relate to other men in an interpersonal setting without women, providing a setting in which to discuss topics that are usually difficult for men to discuss, such as dependency and sexuality (sexual identity, homosexuality, and early childhood sexual experiences), and increasing the political awareness of men as a means for addressing individual and institutional sexism. The all-male group has become an ideal vehicle for facilitation of these tasks as more men perceive the value of self-discovery and self-change. The practitioner who is forming an all-male group designed to address these issues has many variables and tasks to consider.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify these variables and tasks, specify their dimensions, and suggest various responses for the practitioner. The format parallels the same process the practitioner will follow in addressing the issues that arise in the establishment and facilitation of an all-male group. The

reader who is considering facilitating an all-male group is encouraged to consult the references cited within the text of this chapter for further information.

Forming the Group

Prior to the group's first meeting the facilitator needs to consider a number of important issues related to goals, structure, setting, screening, and other variables of an administrative nature. Many of these issues interact and mutually affect one another. However, an attempt will be made to separate them as clearly as possible and raise the questions that need to be considered for each.

GOALS

Specification of the goals of the group is one of the first issues that the group facilitator must address. Will the group be a consciousness-raising group, a psychotherapy group, a growth group, a support group, or a group designed to address a discrete problem or issue?

Consciousness raising groups have the following goals: to increase awareness of the impact of gender-role strain and conflict, to discuss this impact as it relates to the individual group members, and to share personal support in the process of exploration of these issues. Some issues discussed in consciousness raising groups include restrictive emotionality, lack of self-care, conflict concerning issues of competition and power, difficulties with intimacy, individual reactions to feminism and the women's movement, and concerns with male-male and male-female relationships. Growth groups and support groups such as those described by Cochran and Rabinowitz (1983) and Washington (1979) also have goals that converge with the goals for consciousness raising groups yet differ by the amount and type of structure provided by the facilitator.

Stein (1982) has described the content and process of all-male psychotherapy groups. He suggests the following goals for these groups: to decrease current emotional distress, to identify and remediate significant disturbances in interpersonal relationships, and to address concerns about gender identity and gender-role performance as they relate specifically to the group members. These goals are addressed within a context that includes an explicit psychotherapy contract between the members of the group and the facilitator (group psychotherapist) and an expectation that participation in the group will lead to

significant interpersonal and intrapsychic change.

Purdy and Nickle (1981), Currie (1983), Buckley, Miller, and Rolfe (1983), and Bern and Bern (1984) all describe groups designed for men who commit acts of violence. The goals of these groups include the following: to increase the awareness of the group members' violent acts, to increase group members' sense of responsibility for their behavior, and to teach group members other avenues for expression of anger and hostility. Additional examples include groups designed to develop intimacy in isolated men (Bresler, 1982) and to explore sexual experiences and issues (Timmers & Drescher, 1979).

STRUCTURE

Consideration of the goals of any group intersects with questions about the dimensions of structure to be provided by the facilitator. In this context, structure refers to the introduction of procedures, agendas, and specific group exercises by the facilitator. Structure usually varies with the type of group. Interpersonal process-oriented psychotherapy groups with an open-ended format typically require relatively more structure (see Rose, 1977; Washington, 1979). Amount of structure may also vary depending on whether the group is time limited (e.g., 8 or 16 sessions) or ongoing (no specific ending date identified in advance). Other aspects of the group that have a bearing on the amount of structure provided by the facilitator include screening, orientation to the group at a member's first meeting, introduction of exercises at the beginning of the group or as part of the ongoing process of the group, and provision of a structured means for terminating the group. Various authors have written about the kinds of structure they provide in their groups (e.g., Croteau & Burda, 1983; Heppner, 1983; Kaufman & Timmers, 1983; Lewis, 1978; Washington, 1979).

SOLO OR COFACILITATION

Assuming that the group to be formed is one that requires leadership (some groups are specifically designed to be leaderless) the question of whether to lead the group solo or to collaborate with a co-facilitator requires careful consideration. Pfeiffer and Jones (1975) outline some of the advantages and disadvantages of co-facilitating groups. The advantages include being able to facilitate group development more easily as well as provide focus for individual development within the group,

modeling appropriate interpersonal behavior, providing a cushion or safety net for dealing with heightened affect that may emerge within the group, deflecting member dependency issues onto both facilitators rather than one, and heightening focus and pacing of the group. Some of the disadvantages include the extra investment of energy required, issues of threat and competition that may emerge between the facilitators, overwhelming the group with interventions, different pacing and rhythm, and the presence of mutual blind spots for both facilitators.

The solo facilitator assumes all responsibility for securing the physical setting, advertising the group if needed, screening the prospective members and of course leading the group during the group sessions. For the solo facilitator self-assessment that takes into account comfort with responsibility, leadership style, and knowledge about the proposed group is needed. In addition, Heppner (1981) suggests that men's group facilitators be familiar with their own issues of sexism and countertransference as well as knowledgeable about the particular constellation of issues that males typically bring into counseling.

Co-facilitation requires that the facilitators agree regarding the type of group to be formed, the goals of the group, and the type and nature of structure to be provided. They must be knowledgeable of each other's leadership styles as well as how each responds to typical incidents such as a demanding group member, a member who either monopolizes the conversation or who is silent during meetings, or a member who is absent or tardy on a regular basis. It is important for the facilitators to reach some consensus regarding how these and other potentially disruptive events will be managed. Co-facilitators can plan for structuring time outside the group for discussing both the group as well as each individual member and his progress or lack of progress in the group, need for outside consultation or supervision of their work, and how they each conceptualize their role in the group. Pfeiffer and Jones (1975) provide a co-facilitating inventory that serves as a stimulus as well as a structured instrument for mutual exploration of issues relevant to co-facilitators.

SETTING

The optimal setting for the group will depend on group goals, type of facilitation, and amount and type of structure to be provided. Psychotherapy groups may require a comfortable meeting room that is

free from interruptions and that provides privacy and assurance of confidentiality for the members. Comfortable chairs or pillows on the floor serve to increase physical comfort for the members and may increase the likelihood of risk taking. Educational groups may require chairs arranged around a table, a blackboard for various activities, and good lighting. If the group is to be observed for any reason (e.g., training of other group facilitators, supervision of the facilitator, research and so on) there must be a one-way window in the room as well as adequate sound transmission to the observation room. Some facilitators choose to audio- and/or videotape their group sessions. For taped sessions, equipment must be present in the room but not intrude in such a way that it hinders open discussion among group members. Boone and Reid (1978) address these and other considerations in selecting sites for group sessions and workshops, and provide a checklist to guide facilitators in evaluating and selecting appropriate settings for their groups.

SCREENING

The use of a screening interview for prospective group members prior to entering a group has been widely supported in the literature on group counseling and psychotherapy (Bednar, Weet, Evenson, Lanier, & Melnick, 1974; Van Dyck, 1980). The screening interview serves several purposes. First, it enables the group facilitator to meet with a prospective group member, explain the purpose and goals of the group, and answer any questions regarding the group. Second, it enables the facilitator to assure an optimal “match” between the group goals and the prospective member’s goals for the group. Third, it allows the facilitator to refer elsewhere prospective members for whom the group is deemed inappropriate. Finally, it enables the group facilitator to begin to share expectations and shape the norms of the group by discussing the nature of the group and the types of behavior expected in the group.

The group facilitator must specify the questions to explore with the prospective member prior to the screening interview as well as provide a setting for the interview. The following are some suggested questions that may be used as a guide in conducting a screening interview for a growth group or support group. The questions may also be applicable to screening for psychotherapy groups in that they elicit information that can contribute to personality assessment and diagnosis if so desired by the facilitator.

1. How did you hear about this group?

2. What do you expect to learn as a member of this group?
3. Do you have any previous group experience? If so, what was it and what was it like for you?
4. Are you currently in counseling or psychotherapy for any reason?
5. What is a typical day like for you?
6. Have you experienced any significant life events recently such as the loss of a significant person, a change in career, etc.?
7. What makes you different from other men?
8. Do you have any questions that relate to this group?

During the course of such an interview the facilitator can articulate expectations regarding attendance, commitment, self-disclosure, confidentiality, outside readings, and willingness to participate in structured exercises. As the interview progresses, the fit or lack of fit of the prospective member's goals with the goals of the group will begin to become clear. In the event of a fit with the group goals, the facilitator will end the interview by informing the prospective member about the first meeting, time, date, and place. If a significant discrepancy with the goals of the group is apparent, the facilitator may note such discrepancy and discuss this with the prospective member. The facilitator will suggest that the prospective member might be better served through a different group, other service, or perhaps no service at all. It is important that the prospective member understand this discrepancy and recognize the need for referral to some other service modality without feeling personally rejected by the facilitator. Two case examples will help clarify some of these issues.

THE CASE OF JIM K.

Jim K. responded to an advertisement in the local newspaper for an all-male group titled "The Male Experience." He had recently been separated from his spouse and was living on his own in a small efficiency apartment for the first time since his undergraduate college days. He had been married for seven years and reported that the current conflict he experienced with his spouse was the first in their marriage. At the screening interview he reported feeling confused and angry and requested a setting in which he could get some answers to the many questions about himself that this recent separation had

raised. He also reported an increase in his alcohol intake, difficulty sleeping, and increasing difficulty concentrating on his work as a computer programmer. He had recently been confronted by his supervisor about his declining work performance.

The group facilitator explained that the group was designed to be a support group for men that had chosen to live a nontraditional lifestyle. Discussion of the benefits as well as the strains of these choices, relationships with both men and women, and the impact of feminism on the lives of the members was planned in a group that would be limited to 10 sessions. The facilitator understood that Jim was experiencing a significant amount of distress relative to his current situation, was reporting confusion as well as anger regarding this situation, and was also trying to decide if perhaps some individual psychotherapy might also be helpful. The facilitator explained that the group would be composed of men who had mostly answered many of the questions that Jim was asking for himself and suggested that they might not be of much help to him in his situation. In addition, Jim's significant depressive symptoms, increased drinking, and anger as a predominant affective state led the facilitator to offer Jim a referral for individual psychotherapy rather than a place in the group. Jim agreed with this assessment and accepted the referral with great hope and relief.

THE CASE OF ALAN H.

Alan H. responded to the same advertisement. He reported he had been cohabitating with a woman for the past four years and that their relationship was a good one for him. He described himself as a feminist and was active as a volunteer in a local crisis center. He was employed as a nurse in a large hospital and viewed his career as a nontraditional one with both political and personal implications. He reported an interest in discussing some of the difficulties he experienced in balancing his chosen values with those he had learned as a boy in a conservative mid-western town. He also desired to meet some other men who shared similar values. He had been a member of a similar group several years ago and reported it was a very positive experience for him.

The facilitator explained that the purpose of the group was to discuss these issues, provide support for men that had chosen nontraditional lifestyles and values, and offer an opportunity for men of similar values orientations to meet one another. He noted the congruence of the group goals with Alan's goals for

the group, and also understood that Alan had affirmatively chosen these values as an important statement about his lifestyle. He offered Alan a place in the group and informed him of the time, date, and place of the first meeting as well as the planned group activities and time limit. Both agreed that the group would be a good idea for Alan.

SUMMARY

A number of issues regarding group goals, structure, facilitation, setting, and pre-group screening have been raised. The prospective facilitator of all-male groups must consider these issues in shaping a group that will be a useful vehicle for males to explore their own unique concerns. The reader is advised to consult the references cited in each specific section for further clarification and elaboration as well as the various ethical statements of the American Association for Counseling and Development (1981), the National Association of Social Workers (1980), the American College Personnel Association (1981), the Association for Specialists in Group Work (1980), and the American Psychological Association (1981) regarding advertisement, recruitment, and facilitation of personal growth and encounter groups as they might be relevant to the planned group.

The Working Group: Learning Through Conflict and Discovery

The following sections outline the process of a men's consciousness-raising/growth group based on our experience in facilitating these types of groups. Although the conflicts, issues, and stages may not always appear in the order presented, we will describe the group as it unfolds to give the reader a sense of its dynamic quality. While variations in group structure and purpose may alter the depth and intensity of the process, the issues raised and interventions suggested will be useful to the practitioner who is considering facilitating any type of all-male group.

INITIAL GROUP SESSIONS: SETTING THE TONE FOR LEARNING

The initial group session is important in setting the tone for the remainder of the life of the all-male group. The group members, anxious and hopeful, will be looking to the facilitator for structure and leadership. There may be an initial press from the members to get the facilitator to define the situation by

introducing an exercise that will relieve their increasing levels of anxiety. The facilitator, based on personal orientation and the expected length of the group, may choose to rescue the group from its initial floundering or allow the natural group process to take its course.

Heppner (1983), Lewis (1978), and Washington (1979) suggest specific exercises to serve as icebreakers to facilitate introductory interactions among group participants. These exercises ask the group members to pair up, respond to a stimulus that elicits feelings about being male, and to share these feelings with a partner and then with the group as a whole. This procedure helps the group members get to know each other more rapidly. The structured approach has been shown to reduce initial levels of interpersonal anxiety (Washington, 1979), provide specific direction in the form of planned topics for discussion (Wong, 1978), and increase initial self-disclosure (Crews & Melnick, 1976).

Negative effects of early structure have also been documented (Lieberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973). Group members may come to rely on the facilitator to rescue them from uncomfortable silences and conflicts that arise, leading to passivity and a lack of initiative in later stages of the group. The use of structure also seems to protect the male members from dealing with the interpersonal discomfort generated by being in an atypical all male group that is not related to business, sports, or a specific task (Stein, 1982).

It has been our experience that if the group is to be longer than six sessions, the early role of the facilitator is best served by clarifying and supporting members in their initial discomfort while refraining from becoming too directive. This forces the members to confront the ambiguity of the situation and to take responsibility for their participation in the group. Following an awkward silence, one of the members usually suggests an icebreaker exercise that allows for the learning of names, occupation, and reasons for being in the group. This exercise will temporarily decrease anxiety and permit group members to communicate in familiar socially stereotyped conversational modes—taking turns speaking about past experiences in an intellectual and nonemotional manner. In the open-ended ongoing men's group, it is advised that new members be told in the screening interview that they will be expected to talk about themselves in the First meeting. This permits the new member to become involved in the group from the beginning and resensitizes the old members to the anxiety of being new to the group situation.

It is important for the facilitator to pay attention to the nonverbal components of early group communication. Arms folded across the body, minimal eye contact when speaking, and noticeable physical distance between group members should tip off the facilitator to underlying discomfort. By expressing feelings of anxiety and discomfort the facilitator can model non-defensive self-disclosure and a willingness to be vulnerable. The expression of flexible sex-role qualities by a male facilitator provides support and motivation to members attempting to make changes in their own lives through their participation in the group (Stein, 1982).

As the group becomes used to its members' and facilitator's characteristic styles of interacting, normative behavior patterns will come to be expected. This may take the form of taking turns speaking, waiting for the facilitator to intervene in interactions, and encouraging quiet members to be more expressive. At the root of this group behavior is a need for security and inclusion that is necessary before members risk experimenting with new behavior (Schutz, 1967; Yalom, 1975).

EARLY GROUP SESSIONS: ENCOUNTERING RESISTANCE

One of the earliest communication problems encountered in the all-male group is that of self-listening (Farrell, 1975). Rather than listening to others to genuinely appreciate what is being expressed, group members tend to listen only long enough to prepare for what they are going to say in response. This prototypical form of relating reflects the aggressive and competitive nature of male communication (Lewis, 1978; Solomon, 1982). While being aware of their own tendency to engage in this type of communication, male facilitators need to be able to respond to the group members' attempts at self-expression by displaying high levels of empathic understanding. Exercises that incorporate communication skills with self-disclosure (Egan, 1986) may also be useful in improving listening ability among the men in the group.

Aside from poor communication, the early group process is also hampered by ambivalence about change (Stein, 1982). Although the group members will talk about their desire to integrate masculine and feminine qualities and have a less rigid sex-role style, the difficulty lies in translating these ideals into actual behavior. The facilitator role becomes one of drawing attention to discrepancies between what is being discussed and the accompanying here-and-now behavior of members. It can be expected that the

men will become frustrated when confronted with this discrepancy. Some will find refuge in rationalizations about the positive aspects of the male role and blame women for their plight, while others will express guilt and self-blame for having unwanted male characteristics. The group “depression” that permeates this stage seems to be indicative of the male resistance to letting go of years of sex-role training despite the intellectual awareness of its harm (Silverberg, 1986).

A common pitfall of men’s group facilitators dealing with male resistance is the overuse of interpretation as a form of intervention. Stein (1982) suggests that it is more helpful to male group members for facilitators to emphasize affective interventions because of the male tendency to use intellectual insights as a means of avoiding the expression of feelings. It is useful to have group members use “I” statements when describing their experience; to focus on the feelings being expressed rather than the content; to be aware of the discrepancies between verbal and nonverbal behavior; and to confront the resistances blocking emotional awareness through gestalt and psychodrama exercises (see Fedder & Ronall, 1980; Perls, 1969; Polster & Polster, 1973). Techniques that clarify and deepen the affective component of communication serve to help individual members feel understood, assist in modeling effective interaction among the members and promote the establishment of a trusting relationship between members and the facilitator (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 1983; Lewis, 1978).

MIDDLE GROUP SESSIONS: CHANGING THROUGH CONFLICT

Interpersonal conflict occurring between group members and toward the facilitator provides the opportunity for changing long-term patterns of behavior (Bion, 1961; Corey & Corey, 1982; Yalom, 1975). As members come to feel more secure in the group setting, individual differences in attitudes, cultural backgrounds, power needs, competitiveness and interpersonal style become sources of tension and hostility. Because many men have learned to deal with their anger in maladaptive ways (violent acting-out, self-destruction, denial/explosion, passive-aggression), the facilitator must closely monitor how aggression is being expressed in the group. It is important that facilitators be cognizant of their own style of handling angry feelings and aware of possible countertransference issues that might interfere with helping members to deal with their anger (Corey & Corey, 1982; Heppner, 1981; Stein, 1982).

In our experience, hostility and aggression is usually expressed indirectly in the form of ignoring a

member's comment, the off-hand sexist remark, intellectual debating, absenteeism, interpersonal withdrawal, or generalized angry statements about individuals not present in the group. If not addressed, these indirect statements can undermine the trust and safety of the group situation and lead to an escalation of unproductive interaction. The following interchange from one of our groups illustrates how facilitator intervention following an indirect expression of hostility can provide the group with an opportunity to explore the emotional and interpersonal impact of the comments on the individuals involved as well as stimulate discussion on male hostility and aggression.

Jim: I hate women who always tell you what to do, especially in bed. You're damned if you want sex and damned if you don't. How could anyone be happy with that?

Jack: You don't know what you're talking about Love is a two-way street where both people have to communicate their needs.

Facilitator: Jim, You seem pretty angry. It sounds like you have had a personal experience with this type of woman.

Jim: Yea, I still get pissed whenever I hear about a man who is letting a woman run his life. I was in a one-sided relationship for a long time and I almost went crazy.

Facilitator: Jack, you responded fairly strongly to Jim's comment.

Jack: It just pissed me off that he was generalizing so much. I like my wife to be assertive. I'm in this group to learn more about myself so I can be better in relationships, not to bash women.

Facilitator: Can you tell Jim this directly?

Jack: Look Jim . . . It pissed me off when you talked about women that way.

Jim: Hey, I'm sorry. All I meant was that my experience with Julie was horrible for me. I really felt like shit after being with her.

Facilitator: Jim, what are you experiencing now?

Jim: I feel like I made a fool of myself in front of everyone.

Bob: Jim, I admire your willingness to say how you felt about Julie. I can't seem to get the nerve up to talk to my partner about how I feel.

Rick: I wish I could be more straightforward when my girlfriend ticks me off. I usually just walk away feeling sorry for myself.

The conflict that arises in the group at this point represents an occasion for growth and understanding among members. By owning the affective component of the remarks each individual

learns about himself and how he affects others. Other group members who are watching the exchange also feel moved to comment about their own feelings, increasing the communication to the rest of the group. The member who reveals that he feels foolish is quickly supported by another member who admires his ability to talk so bluntly about these issues. The facilitator's role in dealing with conflict is to assist in the identification of underlying feelings, to encourage members to be responsible for their statements, to direct members to speak directly to each other, and to maintain a present-centered orientation toward the individual and the group.

Absenteeism, withdrawal from participation, and boredom may be indications that the group is not meeting the needs of certain members (Yalom, 1975). It is important that the facilitator use these events as springboards for discussion about what is occurring in the group. It is not unusual for members to reveal feelings of being controlled or manipulated by the facilitator's interventions. Some may feel they are changing to be more like the facilitator and resent the loss of identity they are experiencing. Others, harboring alternative viewpoints about the direction of the group, have difficulty expressing their disagreement with the leadership. While these observations have face validity, they also seem to reflect the nature of the transference relationship that develops between members and facilitator (Corey & Corey, 1982).

In many cases, the facilitator or older group member comes to represent a significant authority figure to individuals in the group. Many men have strong feelings about their fathers or male caretakers that have been suppressed for much of their adult lives (Bly, 1986; Osherson, 1986). The facilitator, without becoming defensive, needs to be able to encourage the men to encounter the images of their fathers. Appropriate interventions might include empty-chair gestalt work, psychodrama with members playing various roles, and guided imagery. With the potential to experience the anger, hurt, and despair at having had to deny natural aspects of themselves in order to be men in our culture, male group members can use the group setting to have a dialogue with their fathers and themselves about their true feelings.

Often, the breakthrough of strong emotion by one of the members leads to an increased sense of closeness within the group. It is not unusual for members to identify with the feelings and experience of that individual in a way that seems deeper and more involved than previous encounters in the group.

There is a sense that the grip of control so important to the male identity has been temporarily abandoned and that responding is occurring without intellectual processing. This may allow for uncensored displays of caring and support that include physical embracing and emotional expressivity. Because of the overwhelming nature of these feelings, it is essential that the facilitator use a gentle and accepting manner to encourage members experiencing discomfort to talk about what they are feeling.

The interpersonal closeness and intimacy that develops after some deep work in the men's group has occurred may raise the issue of underlying homophobia (Fasteau, 1974; Lewis, 1978; O'Neil, 1981). Based on the premise that men are only supposed to feel closeness, affection, and sexual feelings toward women, the urge to give a hug to show caring and support to another man outside of the athletic field may lead to panic about sexual identity. It is important for facilitators to help the group address the issue of touching other males through discussion or experiential exercises (Washington, 1979). Sexual identity concerns of a more serious nature may require the facilitator to meet individually with a group member in order to discuss arrangements for more intensive individual therapy outside of the group.

The presence of homosexual or bisexual group members raises fears for the strictly heterosexual members (Beane, 1981). Although initially accepted out of politeness by the straight men, the homosexual group members may feel that they are not being fully incorporated into the group because of their sexual identity. Heterosexual members will often avoid making interpersonal contact with homosexual members and tend to ask questions that reflect their own fears of being homosexual. The facilitator should anticipate this division and encourage the subgroups to discuss their stereotypes and prejudices toward each other openly. Although this may be difficult initially, the dialogue that ensues will often bring the groups to appreciate their similarities and differences.

Once members expect to wrestle with conflicts during the group sessions, there will be a marked change in role for the facilitator. The working men's group will function more autonomously, providing its own support and challenge to its members. A sustained level of trust often emerges between the men that allows for spontaneous humor, disagreement, confrontation, and displays of caring and support. Unlike earlier stages of the group process, outside issues brought into the group are more likely to be dealt with in the present rather than as distractions from current dynamics. Conflicts that have been brought up earlier will typically recycle and be addressed in a manner that allows for greater awareness

and growth among the members.

FINAL GROUP SESSIONS: TERMINATION

The final sessions of the men's group are often devoted to consolidating the learning that has occurred throughout the group experience as well as dealing with issues of separation and loss. As termination nears, members tend to distance themselves from each other and are often reluctant to risk bringing up new concerns. There is also the danger that unresolved conflict may go unchallenged because of the withdrawal of emotional investment in the group. There may be a tendency for members to deny the importance of their learning, to question its applicability in the real world, and to downplay the emotional attachment to one another. It is therefore necessary that the facilitator directly address the issue of termination and the feelings that are involved in the process of letting go of the group as a source of support and interpersonal learning.

The amount of time spent on termination issues will depend on the length of the group and the cohesiveness that has developed. A group that has met for 10 sessions may devote the last 2 to this process, while one that has met for a year may need 5 or more sessions to fully deal with the ending. Corey and Corey (1982) suggest that the members' tasks in the final stage of group are: (a) dealing with feelings of separation; (b) preparing to generalize in-group learning to everyday life; (c) giving and receiving feedback; (d) completing unfinished issues brought to the group; (e) evaluating the impact of the group; and (f) making decisions as to what changes to make and how these can be implemented.

The role of the facilitator is to encourage the expression of grief and sadness as it relates to the separation process and gently to confront member attempts at minimization and denial of these feelings. It is not uncommon for participants to wish they had gotten to know the facilitator and / or quiet members better and to express anxiety about applying their learning to an outside world they perceive as less than accepting of the values learned within the group. It is important to include time for the giving and receiving of feedback among members and facilitator. This gives members a chance to work through unfinished interpersonal conflict, to acknowledge changing perceptions of each other across the life of the group, to give constructive appraisals of areas of strengths and those needing improvement and to provide support for the changes that each individual has made within the group.

A final goal for the termination sessions is assisting group members to consolidate their experience in a conceptual framework that allows them to recall and encode personally significant gender-role learning. Corey and Corey (1982) suggest that the consolidation process is assisted by reviewing the history of the group and evaluating the progress that individuals have made on their personal goals. Exercises that encourage imagining the maintenance of gender-role freedom in the future, setting personal and institutional goals for life after the group, and thinking about ways one might avoid discounting the group experience are helpful in preparing members for the challenges of continued growth following its dissolution.

Summary

This chapter has considered in detail the issues involved in forming and facilitating an all-male group. Group goals, screening, structure, and management of the ongoing process of the group have been discussed. Clearly, many of these issues are issues in common with any group intervention. Several dimensions of the all-male group differentiate it from other general psychotherapy, growth, or educational groups. These include an opportunity to discuss issues of special relevance to men in an all-male setting, the opportunity to acquire necessary interpersonal skills related to intimacy and self-disclosure, and an opportunity to reflect on and examine the values learned in being raised in a predominantly male-dominated culture. It is hoped that the humanizing experience of participation in an all-male growth group, consciousness raising group, or psychotherapy group will have impact beyond the group experience itself and will contribute in some way to the reshaping of our culture into one where cooperation, support, and expressivity as well as individuality are valued.

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