# INTERACTIVE JOURNAL WRITING

# AS AN ADJUNCT TO

# TRAINING GROUPS

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# INTERACTIVE JOURNAL WRITING AS AN ADJUNCT TO TRAINING GROUPS

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

Small groups occur at every level of society, and every person has multiple group memberships. Forty percent of adult Americans consistently attend a small group (Wuthnow, 1994). Groups have many purposes, including training, education, support, and therapy. Small group work in a clinical context began around the turn of the twentieth century. Group work has seen three major spikes in popularity throughout its history: (1) following World War II, (2) 1960's encounter group revolution, and (3) a current surge in group work (Greene, 2000). Although groups are widespread, empirical investigations supporting the healing significance of groups did not emerge until the 1980's. Since then, meta-analyses have repeatedly demonstrated the efficacy and effectiveness of group counseling when compared to individual counseling or a placebo (Burlingame et al., 1995; Smith et al., 1980; Tillitski, 1990; Toseland & Siporin, 1986). Seligman's (1995) consumer reports study also supported the utility of groups. Small group membership is a widespread and effective means of intervention for people in a number of different settings.

The sociocultural significance of group membership is helpful in understanding why therapeutic groups can be an appealing and effective clinical intervention. Among the different types of counseling groups, the focus of this investigation is training groups with the purpose of preparing future group leaders. Training groups are commonly used practices in applied psychology, counselor, and social work training. Numerous forms of training groups originated and were investigated in the 1960's and 1970's (Hall et al., 1999). Most of the groups share a common structure including 12±4 members, a group leader, and a focus on the here-and-now (Smith, 1980). The different types of training groups are referenced by numerous names including Tavistock, Encounter, Experiential, Rogerian, Sensitivity, and T-Groups. There is general consensus that small group participation is an essential component of group leadership training (Corey & Corey, 2002; Gans, Rutan, & Wicox, 1995, Merta, Wolfgang, & McNeil, 1993). Between 60-70% of counselor training programs offer a personal group experience to their students as a means of enhancing group leadership skills (Perls, 1980; Pinney, 1986). The widespread use of training groups has been complemented by a meta-analysis demonstrating their efficacy and effectiveness (Faith, Wong, & Carpenter, 1995). Training groups have a significant history in clinical training, are supported by the majority of current training programs, and have demonstrated empirical validity. Next, the purpose of training groups will be briefly examined in the context of preparing clinicians.

As a learning tool, training groups meet several important training needs of counseling students. The training group experience provides the trainee with an *in vivo* understanding of factors critical to group leadership, including group process, stage progression, and therapeutic factors. Just like other counseling groups, the training group's philosophy is clearly focused on interpersonal issues versus extrapersonal or intrapersonal ones (Waldo, 1985). Considerable interpersonal feedback is exchanged in a training group, leading to clearer awareness of how a student perceives her or himself and others as well as how others perceive the student. This information is critical to effectively dealing with countertransference and transference issues that often arise in group work (Yalom, 1995). An experiential group offers the trainee the opportunity to understand counseling processes at an emotional and practical level rather than a purely cognitive one. The benefits of participating in a training group are multifaceted and lead the counseling trainee towards professional and personal growth. While the training group experience is generally regarded as positive among group practitioners, it is also regarded as minimal training.

Counseling students are rarely afforded the opportunity for any formal training in group work beyond a single semester course in group counseling (Cummings, 2001). Most students need more training experiences to become effective group leaders. Some students seek out these experiences while others will receive training focused individual counseling theory, methods, and practica. A single course in group counseling simply does not meet the training needs for a projected rise in group therapy use among clients (Fuhriman & Burlingame, 2001). There is little sign of including more formal training in group work amidst the already large number of APA courses required for accreditation. This dilemma limits options, making it important to find alternative means of intensifying and/or adding to the current design of the training group experience.

The focus of this study is on improving the training group experience through an adjunctive approach. Discovering ways to enhance the training group will lead to better group leaders, which in turn will lead to better group member experiences for their clients in the future. As a field, group work is still at a relatively young stage of developmental inquiry (Beck & Lewis, 2000). While the live group and various in-group activities have been investigated and written about by numerous experienced group leaders, investigation of adjunctive therapies has been limited. An adjunctive therapy is a supplemental treatment that that minimally interferes with delivery of the original treatment strategy but enhances its overall and effectiveness. Investigative efforts aimed at improving the training group experience are likely to have multiple, long-range benefits for the entire field of group work. Better trained group leaders will lead to more effective groups and more widespread use of therapeutic groups. In this study, journaling is the adjunctive therapy to be investigated. Before describing the components of journaling as an adjunctive strategy, the benefits of journaling as a stand-alone treatment will be examined.

Lepore & Smyth (2002) suggested that writing is "one of humankind's most potent tools for expressing meaning" (p. 3). It has existed for 5,000 years and is common across most all cultures. Journaling can be defined as a method of writing which promotes reflection and holistic processing, extending beyond technical explanation. The benefits of journaling include enhancement in the following areas: (1) reflection and critical thinking (Hiemstra, 2001; Holly, 1989), (2) cognitive/affective organization (Kanitz, 1998; Hettich, 1990; Pennebaker, 1991; Progoff, 1975; Yinger, 1985), (3) intuition and self-expression, (4) awareness of values and biases (Holly, 1989), (5) problem solving (Hiemstra), and (6) stress reduction and health benefits (Hiemstra). Writing exercises have also been shown to enhance social relationships and role functioning (Spera et al., 1994). Griffith and Frieden (2000) suggested that journal writing was one of four counselor education practices that facilitate reflective thinking. Writing is both a reinforcer and facilitator of learning processes. The benefits of journaling are extensive and easily added to the traditional training group experience.

Journal writing has been utilized as an adjunct to counseling in both individual (Brouwers, 1994; France et al., 1995; Riordan, 1996) and group forms (Chen et al., 1998; Cummings, 2001; Doxsee & Kivlighan, 1994; Parr et al., 2000; Riordan & White, 1996; Wenz & McWhirter, 1990; Yalom, 1995). The use of journaling as an adjunct to group work has taken several forms, and journal writing serves different purposes depending upon the context of the group. Three major journaling formats have been used as an adjunct to group work: (1) personal journaling, (2) dyadic journaling [between leader and member], and (3) interactive journaling [among all group participants]. Further extending these formats, writing can be implemented as a within- and/or an out-of-group activity. Within the group, writing may be used to gain insight through immediate reactions. Outside of the group, writing may be used to facilitate reflective thinking and reinforce learning. Journaling is an easily integrated into a therapeutic context and may take different forms depending on the purpose of the group and intentions of the leader.

In this study, interactive journaling outside the group was chosen for several reasons when compared to the other possibilities. Both personal and dyadic journaling offer the safety of keeping one's thoughts private. In either of these forms, the participant is not exposed to the possible judgments of other group members. While helpful, these forms of journaling as an adjunct to group work have two major limitations. The most limiting problem of personal or dyadic journaling as an adjunct to group work is that it creates a form of triangulation where the therapist or group member may feel the need to keep secrets (Riordan & White, 1996). In addition, comparisons of individual versus interactive journaling have found that subjects in an interactive journaling condition write more and are motivated by the comments of their fellow journalers (Kanitz, 1998). The dyadic format also consumes the time of the leader and puts him/her on a pedestal; the group member begins to rely on the leader for feedback. The unique dynamics of a group make personal or subgrouped journaling less amenable as an adjunct to group work than it would be to other applications. Interactive journal writing is more consistent with traditional group theory and does not pose either of the above limitations.

The basic format of interactive journaling as an adjunct to group work is simple. The group leader(s) gives open-ended instruction to participants about how they may wish to proceed with journaling. The most basic requirement is that the journaling somehow be related the group experience. The members and leader(s) of a particular group read, write, and respond to journal entries at their discretion. All group participants have access to all journal entries. Often, the group facilitator provides a summary of the session on the day it was conducted. Interactive journaling is most easily facilitated through internet content management systems, such as Blackboard or WebCT, which enable the group member to respond from any location with a computer at any time. This format could be altered in a number of ways, such as becoming more structured. Group members could be required to submit a certain number of entries or have length requirements for each submission. In this study, the interactive journaling format was intentionally kept simple, allowing the live group process to carry over into the adjunctive journaling.

The format of the interactive journaling for this study was designed by the investigator to mirror the live group process based upon Yalom's interpersonal theory of group psychotherapy (1995). For example, journaling puts writers in a position to learn

"(1) what they know, (2) what they feel, (3) what they do (and how they do it), and (4) why they do it" (Yinger & Clark, 1981, p. 10). This is similar to Yalom's view of the change process in group therapy. Change occurs by interpersonally learning (1) what your behavior is like, (2) how it makes others feel, (3) how it influences the opinions others have of you, and (4) how your behavior influences your opinion of yourself. In this study, the journaling was also designed to be spontaneous, unstructured, and freely interacting. Yalom (1995) described the optimal group process in this manner. In addition to mirroring Yalom's group theory, the basic format of interactive journaling as an adjunct to group work accomplishes several major purposes.

The purposes of interactive journaling as an adjunct to group work are to (1) encourage between-session processing of the group experience, (2) supplement and enrich the face-to-face interactions that spring from the live group experience, (3) encourage participation for the next session, and (4) build meaningful connections between what is learned or experienced in group and in one's personal life (Parr et al., 2000). Interactive journaling also extends the live group process by making the group available to each member at any moment in time. The intermittent timing of journaling capitalizes upon moments when a trainee may experience insight or intense emotion outside of the live group. The journal additionally provides a permanent record of group member interaction, which has been described as a map showing members' growth (Riordan & White, 1996). Interactive journaling complements the live group as it encourages members to reflect on their experiences throughout the week, promoting productive use of group time. Perhaps most importantly, interactive journaling creates a more vivid analytical and reflective examination of group process (Cummings, 2001).

Overall, interactive journaling serves to create a greater sense of community and accelerate cohesion (Parr et al., 2000). Interactive journaling as an adjunct to group work has tremendous potential that has not yet been rigorously evaluated.

Two models of interactive journaling as an adjunct to group work have been proposed based on professors' use of the strategy in their classrooms (Cummings, 2001; Parr et al., 2000). However, while this adjunctive strategy has likely been implemented in many other classrooms, there has yet to be a rigorous quantitative or qualitative investigation of the process and effectiveness of these models. This study of interactive journal writing is a rigorous qualitative investigation that will be conducted with triangulated investigation and systematic inquiry. Interactive journal writing as an adjunctive strategy is a promising means of enhancing group work.

### *Theoretical Assumptions*

The theoretical orientation and methodological bases of this study were informed by phenomenology. Phenomenology is a methodology associated with the theoretical perspective of interpretivism that is epistemologically constructivist, ontologically relativist, and methodologically hermeneutic and dialectic (Guba & Lincoln, 1990). According to this ontology, multiple truths are present in any setting, and in-depth analysis of these truths leads to an enhanced or deepened understanding of the phenomenon under study. Additionally, some intersubjective truths will emerge as a result of people participating in the shared community under investigation. According to phenomenological methodology, all human behavior is purposeful and meaningful. Thus, all human activity is interpretable and intersubjective.

### *Significance of the Study*

In a broadest sense, I hope this study was an important contribution to qualitative methods of group work within psychology. The findings from this study provided information about the processes of training groups that were previously unexamined. Secondly, this study demonstrated the processes and associated themes of applying interactive journal writing to a training group. Interactive journal writing as an adjunct to group work is a relatively new strategy where an understanding of the methods and the meaning of the activity for participants is ultimately lacking. In this study, the participants' own words in form of both brief and thick description provided this insight. The aim of this study was to fill a gap in the existing literature by conducting a rigorous evaluation of interactive journal writing as an adjunct to group work.

### *Limitations of the Study*

There were several major limitations to this study. First, while I have attempted to outline the procedure of interactive journal writing, it will clearly be implemented in different ways according to context. Second, qualitative research studies do not claim generalizability of outcomes. Rather, they describe processes and the experiences of participants. Therefore, additional study is required to determine if the outcomes within the context of this investigation will be applicable in other contexts. Third, as a group facilitator in the case under investigation, I recognize that my biases and subjectivity will have a significant impact on the manner in which participants experienced the phenomenon. Had I been a group member rather than facilitator, my biases would have been less influential. Fourth, because of the amount of data in this study, it was difficult to locate investigators who are willing to invest the amount of time required to immerse oneself in the data. As a result, it was difficult at times to separate out how I experienced the phenomenon and how participants experienced it. The study will ultimately lacked rigorous triangulation of investigators. Because a phenomenological study relies almost purely on the meanings participants give to their experiences, an analysis of other possible factors was beyond the scope of this study. Firestone (1993, p. 22) said, “Qualitative research is best for understanding the processes that go on in a situation and the beliefs and perceptions that go with it.”

### *Purpose of the Study and Research Questions*

The purpose of this study was to explore how interactive journal writing facilitates the process and development of training groups.

1. How does interactive journal writing affect learning from the group experience?
2. How are group process, development, and therapeutic factors affected by interactive journal writing as an adjunct to group work?
3. How do participants engage in the process of interactive journal writing? How do they experience that process? How can interactive journaling be expanded?

### *Definition of Terms*

Adjunctive therapy – supplemental treatment that that minimally interferes with delivery of the original treatment strategy but enhances its overall and effectiveness.

Dyadic journaling – a form of journaling that emphasizes the exchange of journals between each individual group member and the leader.

Group counseling – a form of group work that emphasizes the application of principles of normal human development and functioning.

Group work – an encompassing designation for the four major different types of groups: (1) task and work groups, (2) psychoeducational groups, (3) group counseling, and (4) group psychotherapy.

Journaling - a form of writing which promotes reflection and holistic processing, extending beyond technical explanation.

Live group – indicates a group session where all members of the group are physically present with each other.

Interactive journal writing – a form of journaling as an adjunct to group work that emphasizes the exchange of journals across all group members.

Personal journaling – a form of journaling where participants are asked to keep a personal journal but do not share its contents with the group.

Training group – a form of group counseling primarily reserved for students in training to become group facilitators.

Writing therapy ("Writing Therapy," 2008) – form of expressive therapy that uses the act of writing and processing the written word as therapy. Writing therapeutically can take place individually or in a group and it can be administered in person with a therapist or remotely through mailing or the Internet.

# CHAPTER II

# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review explores the foundations of the emergence of writing as an adjunctive strategy to training groups. First the history, utility, and effectiveness of training groups are reviewed. Then the extensive benefits of journaling as a stand-alone treatment are explored, including its impact upon personal well-being. Next, several different models of writing as an adjunct to group counseling are explored, ranging from early, basic contributions, such as Yalom's written summary, to recent, more complex approaches like the fully interactive journaling model (Parr, Haberstroh, & Kottler, 2000). Writing models applied generally to group counseling are reviewed first, followed by models applied directly to training groups. Journaling can serve many purposes as an adjunct to group work and has a great deal of potential.

## *Training Groups*

Training groups have been a historically important area of study within group work. Among the varied forms of counseling groups, there are a large range of developmental, educational, and preventative goals. The focus of this investigation is on student training groups that have the purpose of preparing future group leaders. Carl Rogers and Kurt Lewin were early pioneers of training group models. Numerous forms of training groups originated and were investigated in the 1960's and 1970's (Hall et al., 1999). The different types of training groups include Tavistock, Encounter, Experiential, Rogerian, Sensitivity, and T-Groups. Most of the groups share a common structure including 12±4 members, a group leader, and a focus on the here-and-now (Smith, 1980).

Training groups are commonly utilized in applied psychological and counselor training and there is general consensus of the importance of small group participation in group leadership training (Corey & Corey, 2002; Gans, Rutan, & Wilcox, 1995, Merta, Wolfgang, & McNeil, 1993). Between 60-70% of counselor training programs offer a personal group experience to their students as a means of enhancing group leadership skills (Perls, 1980; Pinney, 1986). The widespread use of and confidence in training groups has been complemented by a meta-analysis demonstrating their efficacy and effectiveness (Faith, Wong, & Carpenter, 1995). It can therefore be concluded that training groups have a large historical presence, are supported by the majority of training programs, and have demonstrated some empirical validity.

The meta-analysis performed by Faith, Wong, and Carpenter (1995) represents the most comprehensive empirical evaluation of group sensitivity training (GST). Sixty-three studies including 3,238 participants were evaluated to determine a mean effect size (Cohen's $d = .81$, $SE = .11$, Olkin's $d = .62$, $SE = .04$). Olkin's d is an unbiased estimation of effect size, establishing a moderate effect for GSTs. In addition to providing an overall effect size, Faith and colleagues also compared behavioral and self-report measures, finding significantly larger effects for behavioral measures ($B_{ds} = 1.03$, $SR_{ds} = 0.44$). A regression analysis revealed that more sessions ($B = .38$, $p < .001$) and larger groups ($B = .24$, $p < .05$) had larger effect sizes. This meta-analysis brought together a large literature base for the first major quantitative review of GSTs.

The experimental design of the meta-analysis is examined to determine its accuracy and its applicability to training groups. The authors addressed the problem of a possible publication bias, solidifying the moderate effect size (Rosenthal's fail-safe N = 11,608, $p < .05$). A central question regarding group work becomes especially relevant with a meta-analysis. Should group work be measured at the group or individual level? Faith and colleagues do not specify the number of individuals or groups in each study. Many of the effect sizes of studies compiled for the meta-analysis would have been drastically reduced if evaluated at the group rather than individual level. The authors used ancestry and descendancy approaches (Mullen et al., 1998) to locate studies for inclusion in the meta-analysis. Faith and colleagues established two inclusion criteria for their meta-analysis of group sensitivity training. First, the group must have been identified as one of the following types: T-group, (basic) encounter group, marathon group, experiential (training) group, sensitivity training, relationship enhancement training, empathy training, microcounseling, or human relations training. Second, a quantitative treatment/control design must have been implemented in the study. Groups taking place within the business world and/or with explicit behavior modification goals were among the reasons for exclusion. However, participant characteristics were not a reason for exclusion. The GST meta-analysis addressed the issue of publication bias and had reasonable inclusion/exclusion criteria. Faith and colleagues cannot be faulted for the general trend within experimental group work to conduct statistical analyses at the individual rather than group level.

In a meta-analysis, it is best to include only hypotheses that are operationally similar (Mullen, Driskell, & Salas, 1998). Faith et al. (1995) did not report examining studies for problematic statistical design or violation of assumptions. It is unclear whether the studies included in this analysis had similar definitions of the hypotheses. The dependent variables consisted of a range of testing instruments that were at best broadly similar. The 10 different types of groups included in the analysis were possibly overly inclusive. Indeed, the population selected for the meta-analysis turned out to be heterogeneous rather than homogenous [$Q(62) = 205.16$, $p < .05$]. Of the 63 studies in the GST analysis, only 8 involved graduate students. Additionally, the authors failed to identify if the graduate students were counselors-in-training. The average effect size for GST groups involving graduate students was determined through a hand calculation ($d = .075$). The most common group included in the analysis was undergraduates, consisting of 38 studies. The GST meta-analysis was perhaps overly inclusive, and little attention appeared to be paid to examining operational definitions. However, this meta-analysis is by far the best available empirical evidence for the efficacy and effectiveness of training and other experiential groups.

The nature of a training group is different from a therapy group due to the risks created by dual roles, such as abuse of power, intent to exploit, or harm done to the student (Osborn, Daninhirsch, & Page, 2003). Biaggio, Paget, & Chenoweth (1997) emphasized dual roles as the most important consideration in the implementation of a training group and suggested that the greatest dilemma was an instructor who served as group leader and evaluator. There are frequently implicit pressures stemming from the professor-student power differential in a training group, and it is critical that these pressures be explicitly demystified in order to create a safe therapeutic situation. Clarke (1970) described a training group as having the three purposes of instruction, psychotherapy, and exploration of one's human potential; he emphasized that a training group could easily be altered to focus on one of these purposes. Yalom (1995) resolves this incongruency by suggesting that while a training group is not a therapy group, it does offer the opportunity to do therapeutic work. Others have provided evidence that training group experiences do not have different characteristics than group therapy in general (Kirsh, 1974; Lieberman & Gardner, 1976; Noll & Watkins, 1974). The efficacy and effectiveness of group counseling has been repeatedly demonstrated through meta-analyses (Burlingame et al., 1995; Smith et al., 1980; Tillitski, 1990; Toseland & Siporin, 1986). While a training group is not technically a therapy group primarily due to the legal privacy rights of students, the structure and process of a training group is highly similar to other forms of counseling groups in terms of structure and process. Empirical support for training groups can be taken from the larger body of group work.

A pertinent question for group researchers is how long the effects of a training group last. Hall et al. (1999) administered questionnaires to graduates of a master’s program in either counseling or human relations covering a 21-year period. Ninety-two of 334 questionnaires were returned. All participants had previously completed a Rogerian small group experience of ten 3-hour sessions. Participants rated the usefulness of the group experience on a 7-point Likert scale. The group experience was rated above average in usefulness in relation to applications in the professional setting, with colleagues, and in their personal lives with means of 5.41, 4.61, and 5.64, respectively. The educational value of the experience had a mean average of 8.41 on a ten-point likert scale. Two participants reported that the experience was psychological damaging. While the study lacks power due to the use of unstandardized measurement and limited sample size, it is the best available evidence for the long-term effects of training groups. Experiential learning from the training group does not appear to fade over time.

As a learning tool intended to meet the training needs of counseling students, training groups serve several major purposes. First and foremost, the training group experience provides the trainee with an *in vivo* understanding of factors critical to group leadership: group process, stage progression, therapeutic factors, etc. Just like other counseling groups, the training group's philosophy is clearly focused on interpersonal issues versus extrapersonal or intrapersonal ones (Waldo, 1985). Considerable interpersonal feedback is exchanged in a training group, leading to clearer awareness of how a student perceives oneself and others, and additionally, how others perceive the student. This information is critical to effectively dealing with countertransference and transference issues that often arise in group work (Yalom, 1995). An experiential group offers the trainee the opportunity to understand counseling processes at an emotional and practical level rather than a purely cognitive one. In addition to preparing counselor trainees to be group leaders, training groups offer other learning benefits as a unique method of counselor training. Many students choose to work through developmental issues and other personal issues. The training group experience enhances linguistic, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal intelligences (Gardner, 1993), which have been emphasized as crucial to counselor development (Marshall, College, & Fitch, 2001). The benefits of participating in a training group are multifaceted and lead the counseling trainee towards professional and personal growth.

Training groups have an extensive history in the field of group work and are often a starting point to successful research. They have historically and are currently the most important means of training group leaders. The training group meets multiple learning needs for the counseling trainee. The effectiveness of training groups is clearly established in the literature, and the learning effects are long-lasting. Training groups provide a unique method of counselor training necessary for preparing tomorrow's group leaders.

*Journal Writing*

Lepore & Smyth (2002) suggested that writing is "one of humankind's most potent tools for expressing meaning" (p. 3). It has existed for 5,000 years and is common across most all cultures. Journaling can be defined as a method of writing which promotes reflection and holistic processing, extending beyond technical explanation. The benefits of writing include enhancement in the following areas: (1) reflection and critical thinking (Hiemstra, 2001; Holly, 1989), (2) cognitive/affective organization (Kanitz, 1998; Hettich, 1990; Pennebaker, 1991; Progoff, 1975; Yinger, 1985), (3) intuition and self-expression, (4) awareness of values and biases (Holly, 1989), (5) problem solving (Hiemstra), and (6) stress reduction and health benefits (Hiemstra). Writing exercises have also been shown to enhance social relationships and role functioning (Spera et al., 1994). Writing is both a reinforcer and facilitator of learning processes (Griffith & Frieden). The benefits of writing are extensive.

As previously noted, writing takes many forms. Synonyms for writing are used interchangeably so frequently that they are rarely defined. Leaders of research in the area, including Progoff (1975) and Pennebaker (1997), do not define their terms of intensive writing and expressive writing, respectively. Progoff's approach emphasized progressive deepening through writing based on holistic depth work. Pennebaker's approach emphasized the release of inhibited affect by writing about traumatic experiences. In addition, writing therapy has been defined as a form of expressive therapy that uses the act of writing and processing the written word as therapy ("Writing Therapy," 2008). In this study, journaling has been defined as a form of writing which promotes reflection and holistic processing, extending beyond technical explanation. The writing employed in this study parallels Yalom's conceptualization of the optimal group as unstructured, spontaneous, and freely interacting. It clearly involves each of the above processes, and a writing sample from the current study could not be easily categorized into any of these forms. In subsequent paragraphs, studies are evaluated based upon form specific writing approaches.

Pennebaker has been a leader in exploring the empirical effects of expressive writing. In the majority of his writing experiments, participants are asked to write about assigned emotional or superficial topics. Those participants asked to write about superficial topics serve as a control group. Participants generally write for 3-5 days, 15-30 minutes per day. Pennebaker (1997) theorized that since active inhibition is a long-term low-level stressor (Selve, 1976), writing about emotional experiences would reduce this inhibition and therefore reduce general distress. According to a recent meta-analysis (Smyth, 1998) based upon 11 studies, self-disclosure of a written form significantly reduces general distress, having a small to moderate effect ($d = .472$, $p < .0001$). Reduced general distress includes improvements in the following areas: reported health, psychological well-being, physiological functioning, and general functioning. Smyth’s meta-analysis also revealed that writing over longer time periods produces stronger effects. One possible problem with the meta-analysis was that Pennebaker was an author or coauthor in 8 of the 11 studies, suggesting the possibility of experimenter bias and an overall reduction in generalizability. Additionally, many of the outcome measures were dissimilar with the exception of health center visits. Writing about emotional experiences has resulted in significant reductions in physician visits anywhere from 2 months to 4 years after writing (Cameron & Nicholls, 1996; Francis & Pennebaker, 1992; Pennebaker, Barger, and Tiebout, 1989). Physiological improvements, including short-term and long-term immune system changes, have occurred as a result of writing about emotional experiences (Christensen et al., 1996; Dominguez et al., 1995; Pennebaker et al., 1988). Significant behavioral indicators following writing have also been found, including increases in grade point average, faster return to employment following job loss, and less absenteeism from work (Cameron & Nicholls, 1996; Francis & Pennebaker, 1992; Spera, Buhrfeind, & Pennebaker, 1994). Additionally, self-report measures related to symptomology, general distress, and negative affect have consistently found significant reductions (Greenberg & Stone, 1992; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996; Petrie et al., 1995). Smyth's meta-analysis is relatively small (N = 11), and there is considerable dissimilarity across outcome measures. While empirical study of the effects of journaling is relatively recent, the results have been conclusive across several important dimensions of well-being.

*Journaling as an Adjunct to Group Counseling*

Journal writing has been utilized as an adjunct to counseling in both individual (Brouwers, 1994; France et al., 1995; Riordan, 1996) and group forms (Chen et al., 1998; Cummings, 2001; Doxsee & Kivlighan, 1994; Parr et al., 2000; Riordan & White, 1996; Wenz & McWhirter, 1990; Yalom, 1995). Writing may take different forms and is referred to by a number of different designations, such as journaling, letters, logs, and diaries. In a group, writing can take several forms, including a summary of the session written by the leader, having group members write personal logs, and using writing to change the language clients use to think about themselves. Several models of writing as an adjunct to group work are reviewed to illustrate the differences among each of these forms.

Yalom is widely regarded as a pioneer in the utility of writing as an adjunct to group work, although Riordan and Metheny (1972) published the first article in the area. Yalom began writing group narratives for teaching and research purposes well before he considered distributing these summaries to group members (Yalom, Brown, & Bloch, 1975). Yalom originally implemented this technique as a structuring effort to relieve group members' anxieties. Following each group session, Yalom wrote and mailed out a detailed 3-7 page summary. Yalom encouraged the group members to read the summary several times and make editing comments as they saw fit. Yalom believed the written summaries helped demystify the change process in counseling. According to Yalom, the written summary has the ability to reinforce every group leader task.

The written summary serves several important functions. Yalom suggested that process illumination and cognitive integration were the most important of these functions. The letter keeps members from forgetting important details of the session and focused on the importance of the group in the member's life. The written summary can be especially helpful in getting clients to reconnect to emotionally vulnerable issues they may have been too defensive to fully process in the session. Importantly, the written summary helps members reflect upon the group experience but does not interrupt here-and-now group interaction. As a form of therapeutic leverage, the summary can help members stay on the path of dealing with and working through an issue. How group members reflect upon and subsequently discuss the written summaries in the group reveals a lot about their interpersonal character. In addition to group member benefits, the written summary gives the therapist several advantages. The summary forces the therapist to rigorously review the session, gives him/her a second chance to address pertinent issues, and allows for the addition of new thoughts following reflection upon the group experience. Yalom described the therapist as a group historian. The written summary allows the therapist to place members' current struggles within the context of their overarching development. The written summary gives members who have missed a session an overview of important group events. From Yalom's perspective, the written summary was able to complement almost every aspect of the group process, producing a thorough cognitive integration without disrupting here-and-now interaction.

Yalom developed a questionnaire to evaluate group members' perception of the utility of the written summary. Results from the questionnaire indicated that 85% of patients read the letter as soon as it was received, and 70% read it more than once. As well, 85% of the group members reported having a strong emotional reaction to one or more of the written summaries upon reading it. Written group summaries have been found to enhance quality of interaction, focusing, session continuity, and therapeutic work as well as reduce initial anxiety (Asch, Price, & Hawks, 1991; Zieman, Romano, Blanco, & Linnell, 1981). From the clients' perspective, the written summary is a helpful strategy for enhancing the group experience.

Riordan and White's (1996) investigation of logs as an adjunctive strategy to groups goes beyond Yalom's written summary by asking group members to contribute logs. In this model, the group leader has the responsibility of providing feedback on the logs each week. Member logs are especially helpful as a tool of clarification, creating awareness of misunderstandings or apprehension to self-disclose. Member logs also aid in examining the coherence of different members' perceptions of the group experience. Silent or defensive group members may offer diversity of perspective through their written logs (Riordan & White, 1996). The authors indicated that leader feedback was the most important element of the logs according to group members. Reading and giving feedback on the logs allows the leader to monitor group members and reshape norms as a form of therapeutic leverage (Yalom, 1995). Having group members read their logs immediately prior to the group can be a form of focusing the session. Riordan and White described the log as a permanent map displaying group members' growth. Based on their experience implementing logs in groups, Riordan and White reported that 9 out of 10 group members felt favorable toward the practice, including the cathartic, clarifying, and summarizing benefits of the experience. The model of logs as therapeutic adjuncts in group was a valuable beginning in the investigation of writing as an interactive adjunctive strategy.

Another approach to writing as an adjunct to group work is the narrative approach introduced by Chen and Noosbond (1999). Within this social constructivist approach, group is defined as "a linguistic system in which language use may define how members generate meaning from group experiences" (p. 26). The therapeutic document model (Chen, Noosbond, & Bruce, 1998) is based on the power of language to reframe experiences. The authors suggest that psychotherapists consistently disconnect from and depersonalize their clients through traditional, diagnostic problem-focused case notes that are only seen by third parties. According to the narrative approach, group leaders and members are active coconstructors of the therapeutic context (Cecchin, 1992). Thus, when the therapeutic document is presented to the group, feedback is sought and considered to be a form of coauthorship. Voluntarily sharing a therapeutic document increases awareness of conceptualizations and increases therapist transparency. Yalom (1995) combined his process and case notes in a written summary. Yalom's written summary model is extended by implementing the languaging principles of narrative therapy.

Through the therapeutic document model (Chen et al., 1998), the group leader is continually providing members with a new language of change and nonjudgmental attitude. The model consists of four languaging principles: (1) deconstructing the subjugated self, (2) searching for exceptions, (3) maintaining a "not-knowing" position, and (4) internalizing personal agency. The first languaging principle consists of desconstructing a person's negative self-concept. According to this principle, problems are externalized from the person by giving the problem a name. After the problem has been externalized, it is personalized, or animated with human characteristics. Finally, the problem is placed within its sociocultural context. This process rephrases problems and is not an attempt to avoid individual responsibility. The second principle, searching for exceptions, is centered on identifying strengths and exceptions to the problem as well as using a language of transition. This principle highlights members' potential and the steps they are already making toward change. The third languaging principle is maintaining a “not-knowing” position. Instead of assessing or challenging behavior, questions of curiosity are directed towards the client. This principle is intended to get members to reflect upon their experiences (problems) in a non-judgmental, “not-knowing” manner and to examine all the possible outcomes, whether real or imagined. The fourth principle is internalizing personal agency. It consists of attributing positive intentionality to clients even if their behavior is negative and legitimatizing frustration and other negative feelings. Internalizing personal agency includes highlighting positive choices even during difficult times. According to this principle, the client is always viewed as a competent, capable person at the same level as the leader or anyone else. Languaging principles can be difficult to understand without the illustration of examples. Here is an example with a traditional case note first and then a therapeutic document illustrating the languaging principle of attributing positive intentionality: “Jill disclosed her short-tempered behavior in a self-depreciating manner” versus “Jill demonstrated a lot of courage and openness in revealing a low-frustration tolerance, a behavior which is often thought of in a negative way” (Chen et al., 1998, p. 409). The languaging principles of the therapeutic document model make it an important contribution to the investigation of writing as an adjunct to group work.

While no efforts have yet been made to investigate the therapeutic document model as an adjunctive strategy in groups, the therapeutic letter has been implemented into individual re-authoring therapy (White, 1995; White & Epston, 1990). A good therapeutic letter is between 3.2 and 4.5 times as powerful as one session of successful counseling in preliminary investigations (Nylund & Thomas, 1994; White, 1995). A narrative approach to the therapeutic document in group work demonstrates promise as an adjunctive strategy based upon its theoretical foundations and preliminary research. One possible problem with the approach is that it may require a substantial knowledge of narrative therapy. However, within any approach to writing, the practitioner is constantly challenged to be aware of the language being used in the clinical setting.

*Journal Writing as an Adjunct to Training Groups*

The use of writing as adjunct to training groups is increasingly popular and referred to as interactive journal writing, exchange of journal letters, and process notes (Cummings, 2001; Parr, Haberstroh, & Kottler, 2000; Falco & Bauman, 2004). Writing is a pedagogical strategy that is reflective and reinforcing, and graduate students are especially attuned to writing as a form of conveying ideas. The cognitive integration capabilities of writing make it perfect for processing group experiences, which is critical to intrapersonal and interpersonal learning (Conye, 1997; DeLucia-Waack, 1997; Glass & Benshoff, 1999). Each of the three studies examining the utility of writing as an adjunct to training groups has implemented different methodologies. The methodologies and recommendations of each these models will be examined. While each method of writing as an adjunct to training groups provides examples that are useful in illustrating method, they do not meet criteria for a rigorous, investigative process. Each of the three methods are introduced with increasing complexity according to how many group participants wrote and responded to one another.

Most recently, Falco and Bauman (2004) examined the use of interactive process notes in training groups. The major purposes of the interactive process notes are to provide structure and continuity for both group leaders and members. Interactive process notes provide the opportunity for new observations, clarifications, and/or interpretations.

In addition to the strategy's direct enhancement of group work, Falco and Bauman also suggested that students improved their documentation skills in general. Falco and Bauman examined 2 training groups (N =17) that were 1 hour per week for 10 weeks. Their sample was multiculturally diverse, including 7 Caucasians, 4 African Americans, 4 Latinos, 1 Asian, and 1 Native American. Falco and Bauman reported that there was unanimous agreement on the usefulness of the process notes based upon an unnamed questionnaire. While this study did not provide new knowledge of written summaries as an adjunct to groups, it demonstrated that interactive process notes may be successfully applied to a modern, multiculturally diverse training group in a manner that gives students insight into group process. According to this method, writing as an adjunctive strategy to training groups was distributed in one direction, from group leader to group members. Falco and Bauman's process note method is essentially similar to Yalom's written summary technique. Distributing written summaries to group members is a building block for other strategies of journal writing as an adjunct to group.

Written summaries help keep the group facilitator transparent instead of becoming analytically separate from the group. Cummings (2001) described her written summary as having four major goals: (1) call attention to group process, (2) reflect on the decisions made by the group facilitator and why, (3) discuss mistakes made by the facilitator, and (4) reinforce leadership skills and risk-taking behaviors that members displayed in the session. Leader summaries are also helpful in setting and maintaining group norms (Parr et al., 2000). Cummings extended this basic adjunctive strategy by asking students to write letters. Through Cummings' method, students were given structured questions for the first 7 weeks of the group to stimulate letter writing and asked to turn the letters in within a 24-hour period. The group leader then returned the letters with feedback after another 24-hour period. The students' letters gave the leader important information about their difficulties with the group experience. The letter writing and exchange deepened students' processing of the group experience. Cummings' method weighs heavy on leader time and resources; however, it ensures that each student gets direct feedback from the leader following each session. Leader feedback serves to correct misperceptions, encourage risk taking, reinforce behaviors, and answer questions. Providing written feedback to group members is a building block for strategies of journal writing as an adjunct to groups.

Cummings examined one small group that met for 90 minutes per week for 13 weeks. Group size and demographics were not reported. Cummings organized her journaling examples according to the beginning, transition, and working stages of the group, providing 2-3 paragraphs of 4-5 sentences in length for each stage. Through the examples, Cummings demonstrated the manner in which she summarized sessions and how dialogue was exchanged between her and each group member across each stage. To aid in evaluating the journaling, Cummings (2001) conducted an informal evaluation based on 4 open-ended questions. Based upon responses to these questions, there were five common reasons students reported that they liked the journaling: (1) analytical reflection, (2) facilitator feedback, (3) understanding facilitator's intentions, (4) comparison of facilitator and member perceptions of the process, and (5) acceptance. Cummings has 15 years of experience in conducting training groups, which does give her credibility as observer of group process. However, the journaling examples presented by

Cummings do not go beyond a methodological level and therefore, do not constitute an investigative process.

Parr's method of journaling as adjunct to group work goes beyond the previous models discussed because all of the journals circulate among every participant in the group. The goals and purposes of this adjunctive strategy are slightly altered when the journaling process is truly interactive. Parr et al. (2000) outlined the basic goals of interactive journal writing as an adjunct to group work: (1) describe group dynamics and process, (2) provide and process feedback, (3) express feelings that were evoked from the group experience, (4) engage in self-exploration, (5) develop and refine personal goals, (6) address existential and other personal themes, and (7) deepen their relationships with others in the group through honest and genuine self-expression. Most importantly, the relationship among group members is enhanced through their responses to one another throughout each week. Overall, interactive journaling serves to create a greater sense of community and accelerate cohesion (Parr et al., 2000).

Parr's method of journaling as adjunct to group work also goes beyond the previous models by suggesting how the journaling might be strategically used across the beginning, transition, working, and final stages of the group. In the beginning or norming stage, journals can be helpful in establishing ground rules, clarifying the division of responsibility, addressing members' concerns, and setting norms (Parr et al., 2000). In the transition or storming stage, journaling can be helpful in expressing anxieties about the group and reframing the meaning of conflicts. In the working or performing stage, journaling can be helpful in affirming the group's cohesion, expressing caring, voicing hope, and openly confronting one another. In the final or termination stage, journaling

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can be helpful in addressing feelings of loss and fostering transfer of learning from the group to one's life (Parr et al.). Journaling offers the potential to accelerate each of the different forms of expression throughout the progression of stages within the group.

The interactive journaling method offers an important advantage compared with other methods due to the unique dynamics of a group, characterized by complex interaction patterns between and among participants. Both personal and dyadic journaling offer the safety of keeping one’s thoughts private. In either of these forms, the participant is not exposed to the possible judgments of other group members. While helpful, these forms of journaling as an adjunct to group work have two major limitations. The most limiting problem of personal or dyadic journaling as an adjunct to group work is that it creates a form of triangulation where the therapist or group member may feel the need to keep secrets (Riordan & White, 1996). In addition, comparisons of individual versus interactive journaling have found that subjects in an interactive journaling condition write more and are motivated by the comments of their fellow journalers (Kanitz, 1998). The dyadic format also consumes the time of the leader and puts him/her on a pedestal; the group member begins to rely on the leader for feedback. Imagine if the group leader of a training group conducted one-on-one sessions with each of the group members outside of the group session. How would this be viewed by experts in the field? The unique dynamics of a group make personal or subgrouped journaling less amenable as an adjunct to group work than it would be to other applications. Interactive journal writing is more consistent with traditional group theory and poses neither of the above limitations.

Another advantage of interactive journaling is that it allows a participant to engage the group as often as one would like. Internet content management systems, such as WebCT or Blackboard, extend the live group process, making the group available to each member at most any moment in time. The intermittent timing of journaling capitalizes upon moments when a group member may experience insight or intense emotion outside of the live group. Interactive journaling complements the live group as it encourages members to reflect on their experiences throughout the week, promoting productive use of group time.

Another advantage of this model is how it mirrors Yalom's approach to group psychotherapy. Parr et al. (2000) suggested that journal writing was an extension of the live group and that nearly all of Yalom's therapeutic factors could be extended into the journaling. Hope, altruism, universality, catharsis, cohesiveness, and interpersonal learning are all available through the journaling process. How people learn through journaling and from a Yalom approach is also similar. Journaling puts writers in a position to learn "(1) what they know, (2) what they feel, (3) what they do (and how they do it), and (4) why they do it" (Yinger & Clark, 1981, p. 10). This is similar to Yalom's view (1995) of the change process in group therapy. Change occurs by interpersonally learning (1) what your behavior is like, (2) how it makes others feel, (3) how it influences the opinions others have of you, and (4) how your behavior influences your opinion of yourself. This format of interactive journaling provides continuity to Yalom's interpersonal theory of group psychotherapy.

According to Parr's method and procedure, group members are instructed that journal writing has the following purposes: (1) encourage between-session processing of the group experience, (2) supplement and enrich the face-to-face interactions that spring from the live group experience, (3) encourage their participation for the next session, and (4) build meaningful connections between what is learned or experienced in group and their personal lives. Group members were also instructed to write autobiographies early in the group as one form of structuring the experience. To illustrate the interactive journaling method, Parr et al. provided one example of a leader summary. The leader summary provides feedback and process commentary. One example of the processing of journals in the group session is also provided. Additionally, the four stages of the group process are illustrated with one small paragraph each. Again, it is clear that Parr et al. is illustrating the method rather than an investigative attempt.

A common thread throughout the methods is the group leader(s) writing a summary of the session following each group. All three studies provide illustrative examples following the group stage progression. However, none of the authors presented evidence of a rigorous investigation of journaling as an adjunctive strategy to training groups. While group leaders have often relied on experience to determine interventions, rigorous investigation will likely improve its delivery and acceptance among those group workers who had not previously considered writing as an adjunctive strategy.

*Conclusion*

Journal writing as an adjunct to group work is an increasingly popular intervention strategy. The benefits of journaling are extensive and especially amenable to group process. Six models of journal writing as an adjunct to group work have been reviewed. It is clear that written summaries of group sessions are beneficial to both group leaders and members and that the more involved members are in the journaling process, the more they benefit. Training groups are a unique method of counselor training with widespread acceptance across training programs and demonstrated validity. The characteristics of graduate students make journal writing as an adjunct to training groups an especially promising training strategy despite a current lack of empirical support.

# CHAPTER III

# METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how interactive journal writing affects group process and learning from the training group experience. In this chapter, the purpose is transformed into a rigorous qualitative research design. First, the reasons for utilizing qualitative methods of inquiry and initial choices for focusing that inquiry are discussed. Then the implications, limitations, and transferability of the chosen methods are outlined. The central role of the primary investigator in the training group setting is discussed, including researcher subjectivities and biases. The theoretical orientation and methodological bases of the study are established from a phenomenological perspective. The principles of qualitative rigor upon which one should evaluate the quality and creditability of the methods are discussed. Finally, the procedures of the study, including participant selection and format of the group and the journaling are presented. The methods discussed in this chapter thoroughly address the purpose of exploring interactive journal writing as an adjunctive strategy.

## *Choosing Methods of Inquiry*

There were two major reasons for the methodology chosen in this study. First, a qualitative methodology could account for the complex structure and dynamic nature of groups. Second, there is a paucity of research examining interactive journal writing as an adjunctive strategy to groups in psychology literature. It is difficult to measure outcomes of an intervention strategy without a thorough understanding of the different components of the intervention and the process of applying it. Qualitative inquiry allows the investigator to account for complexity and to explore factors that might contribute to a particular phenomenon.

"Perhaps the clearest lesson from the group research over the past 90 years is an acknowledgment of its complex nature" (Horne & Rosenthal, 1997, p. 235). A group consists of a complicated matrix of member-to-member, leader-to-member, and member-to-leader interactions. Groups are complex because they are nonlinear, or dynamic, and every group is unique. Wilbur et al. (1995) suggested that qualitative research was the best approach to the study of nonlinear phenomena.

Interactive journal writing as an adjunct to group work is a relatively new intervention that has little to no previous research supporting its use. Two detailed models of interactive journaling as an adjunct to group work have been proposed based on researchers' use of the strategy in their classrooms (Cummings, 2001, & Parr et al., 2000). However, while this adjunctive strategy has likely been implemented in many other classrooms, there has yet to be a systematic investigation of these models or a similar strategy. In an effort to provide meaningful empirical support, this study aimed to understand the thematic content and process associated with applying interactive journal writing to group counseling.

The philosophy and methods of phenomenology were chosen as the best fit for the purposes of the current study. A phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 2002). Phenomenology is about beginnings, and relatively little is known about the various factors involved in interactive journal writing. The journaling intervention itself is a descriptive dialogue exchange, lending itself well to phenomenological methods. Finally, phenomenology is about seeing complexity and meaning in here-and-now experiences. Phenomenological methods were helpful in going beyond surface understandings and developing meaningful themes through critical reflection. The seminal nature of interactive journaling, the central role of group members' descriptions in the journaling process, and the complexities of group interaction were grounds for implementing phenomenological theory and methods.

### *Scope and Limitations of the Study*

A phenomenological study has as its goal to distill the essence of an experience. Capturing the essence of the phenomenon of being in a training group with the additional component of interactive journaling was beyond the scope of this study. Instead, this study focused on identifying and describing the essence of the interactive journaling as it relates to being in the group. Training groups have had much written about their structure and texture, or their process and content, respectively. I was more interested in the beginnings of the journal writing as an adjunctive strategy. The goal of this study was not simply to improve training groups but to describe the experience of interactive journal writing as an adjunctive strategy that may be applied to group counseling.

There are several major limitations to this study. While I have attempted to outline the procedure of interactive journal writing, it will clearly be implemented in different ways according to context. In addition, additional study is required to determine if the outcomes within the context of this investigation will be applicable in other contexts. Transferability has been defined as the "degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 297). Transferability was limited because there is only one sending context; one group is being studied at one location. Further, as a group facilitator in the case under investigation, my biases and subjectivities may have had a significant impact on the manner in which participants experienced the phenomenon. If I were a group member rather than facilitator, my biases may have been less influential. Also, because of the amount of data in this study, it was difficult to locate investigators who are willing to invest the amount of time required to immerse oneself in the data. As a result, it may be difficult at times to separate out how I experienced the phenomenon and how participants experienced it. Because a phenomenological study relies almost purely on the meanings participants give to their experiences, an analysis of other possible factors was beyond the scope of this study.

### *Being at the Center of the Study*

I was in a unique situation as both the researcher and the group facilitator. I experienced the phenomenon intensely but not in a similar manner to participants. In this study, I was the lone facilitator alongside 11 group members. I was constantly engaging the participants, but my role is to facilitate their growth not my own. When asked about the difference between being a group participant and a group facilitator, one participant said, “Well, you’re way more vulnerable as a client, and you have to, um, be able, ya know, you have to be able to get over those fears and um, feelings of mistrust if you’re going to learn anything. And that’s a lot scarier than being, um, I would think, a facilitator of a group like that” (Lacey, 2005, 191-194). While both the group members and myself experienced the phenomenon in an intense manner, perceptions of the phenomenon were likely different due to our positions within the group.

Yalom (1995) described the group leader much like a participant-observer. However, the power relations are certainly different from traditional participant-observation fieldwork settings as the leader has substantial power within the small group. The group leader molds the group culture and also serves to model many group behaviors. One of the primary functions of the group leader is to make observations about the group as a whole as it unfolds. The therapist serves two basic roles as a model-setting participant and as a technical expert, both of which shape the group culture. As a technical expert, the therapist may employ a wide range of techniques ranging from explicit instructions and suggestions to subtle reinforcement (Yalom, 1995). As a technical expert, the therapist sets the rules and the tone of the group. The therapist's interventions are reinforced in two ways: (1) weight of authority and experience of the therapist, and (2) presenting the rationale behind the suggested mode of procedure (p. 113). As a model-setting participant, it is important that the therapist show the group members that taking risks and engaging in new behaviors is not negative (Yalom). The therapist also models how to treat group members with respect and acceptance. Another reason for therapists being involved as a model-setting participant is to demonstrate personal fallibility. As a researcher serving as a model-setting participant and technical expert, I was in an emic position. I was part of the meaning-making process at every juncture of the study. As a result, it was difficult to back away from experience and see it through a different lens. In addition to being the group facilitator, I also taught the group class on occasion due to the professor's illness. Participants may have experienced my input and involvement in a real or imagined evaluative role. However, being at the center of the study also kept me consistently connected to participants throughout the study.

### *Researcher Subjectivity and Biases.*

Credibility is the principle of reporting "any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation" (Patton, 2002, p. 566). I hope to clarify my basic tendencies as a group facilitator, biases about the process of group counseling, and my own countertransference issues to establish credibility. Yalom described therapists as varying considerably in their style of group interaction. All therapists socially reinforce behavior, whether they are aware of it or not. My tendencies as a group facilitator stem from both my experiences in supervision of the training group and my own reflection upon experiences occurring during this project. As a group leader, I tend to emphasize modeling, especially spontaneity and genuineness. Yalom (1995) suggested that a group is at its best when it is spontaneous, unstructured, and freely interacting. In this project, my supervisor and I implemented a strategy based on a lack of structure. I am also fairly confrontational and take risks as a group leader. I tend to confront others strongly and then soften up with support. I don't mind letting others struggle as I believe it leads to growth. Every group leader develops a style that is congruent with his/her personality. My interactional tendencies certainly shaped the culture of the group process.

Yalom (1995) contends process-oriented groups are centered around interpersonal learning and relationships. Thus, one would expect the therapist's countertransference issues to be relevant. These issues went beyond my intentionality as a group leader and are likely to color any experience in which there is meaning-making, including my analysis of the data. Throughout my life, I have felt responsibility for others. In the therapeutic atmosphere, this has lead to working harder than my clients. In a group, this may manifest by becoming too active as a group leader in attempting to mold the group culture. This tendency also leads to taking responsibility as a leader and participant in the group. I also tend to have high expectations of myself, which sometimes transfers into high expectations for others. At times, I might impose my own expectations onto others in the group. Alternatively, others might be inspired by my aspirations. I tend to be perfectionistic and serious in my endeavors, sometimes taking the fun out of them. I may attempt to get the group to engage in a deeper form of process or expect the group to maintain that focus, resulting in a less natural group process. I tend to look for reassurance in my own endeavors and relationships. I may look to the group for reassurance as a group leader. I tend to get frustrated if I cannot get my point across and give up on doing so, which results in an ineffective communication exchange. In a group, this tendency may result in poor modeling of communication. One considerable bias of mine is my unyielding belief in the process of the group. Usually, I view serious breakdowns in process as a result of lack of effort. It would be difficult for me to view any group as a failure because I believe that we learn even from the mistakes. Just as my supervisor constantly believed in me, I constantly believed in the group. These issues likely influenced the process of conducting this study in the following manner. Participants may have felt pressure to perform in a certain manner to meet my expectations. Some participants indicated near the end of the group that they felt my high expectations from the beginning. Some participants talked about a better understanding of personal responsibility. This may have been influenced by my sense of responsibility for the training group experience and an emphasis on personal growth. Each of these issues of countertransference influenced my interactions with group members and the group culture as a whole. It is difficult to know how theses issues actually affected the group until a thorough analysis is complete.

### *Interpretivism*

A theoretical perspective is the philosophy of science that underlies a particular research methodology (Crotty 1998). Interpretivism arose against attempts to empiricise social reality in a similar fashion to the natural sciences and became prevalent with the "blurred genres phase" of qualitative inquiry (Schwandt, 1994; Patton, 2002). Rather than attempting to control the environment of inquiry through use of classic scientific method, attempts are made to describe the context in great detail. Interpretivism is historically characterized by three different streams. Hermeneutics was the first stream of thought followed by phenomenology and more recently symbolic interactionism. In this study, phenomenology was chosen as the form of interpretivism most accurately reflecting the researcher's intentions in combination with the investigational context. As an interpersonal psychotherapist, my underlying assumptions of people mirror those of humanistic psychology. I believe that all people are striving towards growth, and a phenomenological investigation attempts to respect each person's intentions and contributions to the phenomenon. As an exploratory study, my goal is to reach an enhanced or deepened understanding of the process of interactive journal writing as an adjunctive strategy. Since I am studying a group with a number of possible interaction patterns, a method of hermeneutics restricts the focus too intensely towards individual experience. Symbolic interactionist methods foster the opposite extreme of denying personal experience in favor of viewing people as purely interactional beings while denying autonomy. The phenomenological method allows me to study both the meanings stemming from individual experience and the common meanings that address the essence of the journal writing activity.

*Phenomenological Methodology.*

Husserl and Heidegger are perhaps the most well-known among a number of distinguished philosophers who have contributed to current systems of phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenology is a critical inquiry suspicious of cultural influences and prior knowledge (Crotty, 1998). All phenomenological methodology is characterized by a search for meaning in people's intentional experiences. Intentionality is an underlying assumption is that all behavior has a purpose. Thus, phenomenological methodology is characterized by an attempt to capture here-and-now experience through the purposeful lens of the participants.

Reductio and vocatio are two principles that permeate most all phenomenogical methodology (van Manen, 2002). Reductio is radical reflection characterized by the attempt to suspend prior assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation. Openness must be practiced to the greatest extent possible. Reductio allows one to recapture past moments of lived experience in a here-and-now manner. Vocatio is the textual portrayal of meaning. The power of language inherent in vocatio is critical to capturing essence, whether it is participant's words or the investigator's creative contemplations. Another important principle in phenomenological methodology is empathic understanding, which is the felt sense of being in the world. Thus, intellectual understanding is not enough; one learns from being enactive, embodied, relational, and situational. Knowledge is gained through actions, internal intuition, our relations with others, and is situated within a specific environments (von Manen). Reductio, vocatio, and empathic understanding are the basis of a phenomenological methodology.

The above principles represent core understandings, ones that are necessary for a thorough, thoughtful, and rigorous phenomenological philosophy and methodology. Professional practitioners have tended to focus on practice and application while ignoring these core understandings as the base of a phenomenological methodology (van Manen, 2002). In conclusion, an investigator within this philosophical approach to inquiry seeks to experience the phenomenon precisely as the person(s) being studied have experienced it. In this study, I rely on my past experiences in training groups, my felt experiences as a group facilitator in training groups, and my attempts towards experiencing data through reductio to give meaning to the phenomenon.

*Phenomenological Analysis.*

The intention of the phenomenological analysis was to “grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or a group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 482). There are many methods available to the phenomenological investigator to achieve this intention. Van Manen (2002) suggested that an eclectic approach to phenomenological method may be preferable for scholars investigating areas of professional practice. As a psychologist trained in many theories and having many experiences with clients, I implemented the phenomenological method long before I started the current investigation. The methods chosen were selected to allow freedoms to the investigator while sustaining a highly critical inquiry. The major stages of phenomenological analysis in this study consisted of epoche, thematic reflection, guided existential reflection, and a creative synthesis of texture and structure.

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Epoche is the phenomenological practice associated with the attempt to achieve reductio. Epoche is an attempt to view something as it is without prior judgment or experience (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, mindfulness was a major path towards reaching epoche due to my previous experience in this area. Epoche included obtaining awareness of personal biases, personal involvement with, and preconceptions about the phenomena (Patton 2002) as presented earlier in this chapter. These aspects of epoche were not only a preparation for analyzing the data but also served as a source of data. The phenomenological attitude shift associated with epoche produces qualitative rigor. The preconceptions and judgments of the researcher are partially neutralized to allow for emergence of the phenomenon through the intentional lens of the participants.

The second stage of the methods was thematic reflection. It was first necessary to reduce and focus the range and variety of data. Interpretation of the data began with the bracketing of meaningful information and elimination of irrelevant material (Patton, 2002). Thematic reflection has been defined as the “process of recovering structures of meanings that are embodied and dramatized in human experience represented in a text” (van Manen, 2002). Thematic analysis emphasizes the freedom to explore any possible avenues of ‘seeing’ meaning and occurs at both the macro and micro levels. Macro-thematic reflection is concerned with the gestalt, attempting to speak directly to the essence of the phenomenon as a whole. Micro-thematic reflection is more selective and focused on drawing out phrasing that relates to the phenomenon under investigation. Thematic reflection was heavily relied upon in this study as a method of analysis and interpretation.

The final stage of the methods was a creative synthesis of texture and structure. Texture is the thematic content in the form of thick description or other illustrations (Patton, 2002). Texture provides content but lacks reflective meaning and essence. Structure is a holistic process analysis of *how* the group as a whole came to experience what they experience (Moustakas, 1994). The last step is an essential integration where meaning is constructed out of the textual content and the structural process. The *what* and *how*, or the content and the process, are combined with critical reflection to develop meaning and ultimately, essence.

Consistent with phenomenological philosophy, each of the above methods was pursued with both freedom and caution and subject to emergent design flexibility. An assumption of this study was that there are core meanings mutually understood through a commonly experienced phenomenon. The experiences of participants were bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essence of the interactive journal writing group experience.

### *Qualitative Rigor*

Lincoln and Guba (1985) view trustworthiness as the most critical concept in establishing qualitative rigor. Trustworthiness consists of four criteria, including truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. These criteria compare to the conventional quantitative paradigm as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, respectively. According to truth value, multiple perspectives on *reality* should be represented adequately. In this study, thick description from all 11 participants was the main source of a search for meaning in the data. Applicability corresponds to the concept of transferability. Transferability can be defined as the "degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, p. 297). Transferability suggests that the investigator cannot decide for the audience how applicable the research findings are. In this study, the sample was a training group in a master's level group process class, and group member characteristics were obvious in the thick description provided. Although this study is limited to a single group, readers should be able to determine if the experience described by participants is one that would be applicable to their own interests. Consistency corresponds to the concept of dependability. Through dependability, one is accounting for the dynamic change processes present in a given study. One might ask, how has the design of the study influenced the natural environment? The interactive journaling component of the study was new to the group class regimen. Participants reported that the journaling intensified the group experience. My excitement regarding the adjunctive strategy and its newness to the students are important factors to consider. Prolonged engagement contributed to my understanding dynamic changes in the group over time. Neutrality corresponds to the concept of confirmability. Neutrality is the ability to confirm subjectiveness through the data rather than to obtain a certain degree of objectivity. Epoche was my attempt to remain neutral as a researcher and open to emerging themes. Additionally, the research design emphasized triangulation. Most important were the 4 different sources of data collection. The videotaped sessions provide a sample of the participants in live group interaction with each other. The journaling provided a sample of asynchronous discussion in written form. The interview provided the opportunity for spontaneous participant responses and the pursuit of researcher inquiries. Finally, the paper was a reflective, more formal writing sample that summarizes the training group experience in a personal manner.

Eleven group members, 1 group leader/primary investigator, and 1 supervisor were intersected with these 4 sources of data. Many of the strategies for establishing trustworthiness as outlined by Lincoln and Guba have been implemented in this study to produce a credible and rigorous qualitative investigation.

### *Selection of Participants and Procedure*

Participants were recruited from a master's level group class. See Appendices 1.1 and 1.2 for informed consent, and Appendices 2.1 and 2.2 for scripts. The experiential training group was a required laboratory component of the class. Participants were randomly assigned to either the interactive journaling or a personal journaling condition. The focus of this study was an intensive investigation of the interactive journaling condition. Participants were 11 master's level counselor trainees. The master's level trainees varied in their academic progression within the program. More experience in the program appeared to lend itself towards greater openness to the group experience.

The sample for this study was both purposeful and opportunistic. While the investigation was originally intended as a pilot study, the sample was quickly recognized as promising data containing a thick, rich description of the phenomena (Bear, 2004; Otto 2004; Patton, 2002). The choice was made to focus intensely upon a single group for investigation of the phenomenon. An intensity sample is one that "consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)" (Patton 2002, p. 234). In this study, the choice was made to intensely pursue a pilot group that appeared to represent the essence of the phenomenon.

The training group was designed to meet for 12 weekly sessions according the structure outlined by the professor of the group process course. Three sources of data were to be collected. The first source of data was video-recording of each session with accompanying transcription. The second source of data was the interactive journal itself. Participants were asked to spend a minimum of 30 minutes per week reading and responding to interactive journaling entries. The third source of data was individual interviews with each of the participants. Data collection will be open to emergent design flexibility, leaving the possibility of abandoning unhelpful sources of data or adding new sources of data.

The research design stayed intact for the most part during the 9-month duration of the study. Ten of the 11 sessions were videotaped and transcribed; one was not recorded due to the researcher's error. More than 200 pages of interactive journaling data were collected. Participants reported spending an average of 2 hours on the journaling, well above the minimum recommendation. Ten of the 11 group members participated in a semi-structured 45-minute interview at a 5-month follow-up to the group. All interviews were transcribed. One member indicated that she was too busy to participate in an interview at the time. One source of data collection was added to the research design. As part of the class, students were asked to write a term paper describing their experience in the group and any changes they recognized as a result of their participation. This more private form of self-reflection was compared to the other data. The 9-month duration of observations and fieldwork (Patton 2002), or prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), adds to the credibility of the data. Each of the sources of data collected was information-rich and provided a solid basis for triangulation of data.

### *Process Orientation of the Group*

The training groups were conducted according to Yalom's interpersonal process-oriented approach (1995). See Appendix 3.1 for written instructions regarding the group's purpose and expectations of its members. Yalom described the optimal group as spontaneous, unstructured, and freely interacting. Participants were given little to no structure in the training group experience. The recognition and utilization of therapeutic factors and the progression of stages were both essential in this approach. In this study, the eleven therapeutic factors were examined for their presence and potency within the group. Therapeutic factors were viewed as the major mechanisms of change and the healing properties within the group. The various combinations of therapeutic factors and the possibility of new ones was examined. Yalom discusses the group as a therapeutic social system that is to a large extent, responsible for its own change. The structure of the group and implications of power were examined through this lens. The group's development was examined through Yalom's different stage characteristics such as hesitant participation, search for meaning, conflict, and cohesiveness. How group members recognize, approach, and illuminate the process of the group was explored.

### *Interactive Journal Writing Format*

The interactive journaling in this study was designed to be an extension of the live group process by mirroring Yalom's approach to group psychotherapy. Nearly all of Yalom's therapeutic factors could be extended into the journaling. Hope, altruism, universality, catharsis, cohesiveness, and interpersonal learning are all available through the journaling process (Parr et al., 2000). The interactive journaling was designed to put group members in a position to learn "(1) what they know, (2) what they feel, (3) what they do (and how they do it), and (4) why they do it" (Yinger & Clark, 1981, p. 10). This is similar to Yalom's view (1995) of the change process in group therapy. Change occurs by interpersonally learning (1) what your behavior is like, (2) how it makes others feel, (3) how it influences the opinions others have of you, and (4) how your behavior influences your opinion of yourself. This format of interactive journaling provided continuity to Yalom's interpersonal theory of group psychotherapy.

Participants were introduced to the online environment in a 45-minute demonstration by the investigator. See Appendix 3.2 for written instructions regarding the journaling. Participants practiced posting messages, logging-in, navigating categorical descriptors, etc. Participants were asked spend a minimum of 30 minutes per week reading, writing, and/or responding to journal entries following each group session. Again, the interactive journaling format was largely unstructured as it was designed to mirror group process.

### *Conclusion*

Many of the outlined methods are best understood as ideals. Just as the focus of a group is on here-and-now experience (Yalom, 1995), so too is the focus of phenomenological inquiry. The focus of interpretation will shifted with my experiencing of the phenomenon. The intention of phenomenological analysis was to "grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or a group of people" (van Manen, 2002, p. 482). The methods presented in this chapter represent a critical, comprehensive, and complex inquiry that addresses this intention. These methods and their accompanying rigor resulted in an enhanced understanding of interactive journal writing as an adjunctive strategy to group work.

# CHAPTER IV

# FINDINGS

## *Evolution of Methods: Research Questions, Theory, and Analyses*

The approach to data analysis, including the research questions themselves, was proposed with the intention of emergent design flexibility. The below research questions were created in conjunction with the purpose of the study to explore how interactive journal writing affects group process and learning:

1. How does interactive journal writing affect learning from the group experience?
2. How are group process, development, and therapeutic factors affected by interactive journal writing as an adjunct to group work?
3. How do participants engage in the process of interactive journal writing? How do they experience that process?

The research questions were first reinterpreted upon choosing a phenomenological inquiry as the method for the study. Phenomenological methods require the researcher to carefully consider how the research questions are asked. The wording of questions has a subsequent impact upon how they are answered. Phenomenological analysis aims to "grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or a group of people (Patton, 2002, p. 482). The research questions evolved in a manner consistent with this approach: What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the interactive journaling group experience? The research questions further evolved upon analysis of the data. While I attempted to suspend my

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biases, I believed that I would be focusing most on the meaning and essence of the phenomenon rather than its structure. I never thought that I would spend so much time thinking about time and space or the reciprocal structure of courage. Within the analysis, the research question was again reinterpreted to ask: How does the structure of the interactive journaling experience inform its meaning and essence?

The early phases of analysis were guided by a holistic phenomenological approach. As the analysis deepened, this framework was extended to include an existential focus. The addition of an existential focus was not expected but also not surprising considering that facilitation of the group was based on Yalom's existential-process approach to group therapy. Existentialism shares with phenomenology a search for meaning and recognition of themes that operate below the surface level. An existential approach enriched the analysis because some of its core concepts approximated the essence of participant experiencing. The development of data patterns and relationships was accompanied by the refined theoretical approach of existential-phenomenology.

A holistic inductive analysis of the data was conducted with the goal of Verstehen – increasing and deepening understanding of the phenomenon. A micro-level analysis was not desirable or plausible for two reasons. First, this type of analysis may have led to reductionistic content categories and poorly communicated the essence of the group experience. Second, due to the sheer volume of the data and with only one person having intimate familiarity with the data, this approach was impractical. Instead, the entire data set was examined utilizing a holistic inductive approach. Patterns and relationships were discovered and creatively synthesized, and then, meaningful themes were developed. This process was repeated several times to arrive at the current themes.

*Sources of Data and Referencing*

In the analysis, there is a focus on the language of participants, including the naming of themes, brief quotes, and selected thick descriptions. The participant data came from four sources: 1. Group Video Transcriptions (GVT); 2. Interactive Journaling Documents (IJD); 3. Essay Documents (ED); and 4. Interview Transcriptions (IT). The different data sources were referenced by pseudonym and descriptors of time and/or location in the data set. For example, "(Misty IJD 8.01.0903)" indicates that Misty made a journal entry following the 8th session, on the first day of the month, at 9:03 am. "(Sandy ED 18)" indicates that the selected data came from the 18th page of Sandy's essay on the group experience. "(Brandy GVT 9)" indicates that the selected data came from one of Brandy's statements during the 9th group session. "(Teresa IT 356-361)" indicates that selected data came from lines 356-361 of the interview with Teresa. The GVT's provided access to here-and-now participant experiencing within the live group, and the IJD's provided similar access to the journaling. The ED's and IT's were more reflective as they provided access to post-group perceptions of the experience. Using this referencing system, the data were triangulated across the following themes.

*Theme 1 Courage*

The premise of this theme is that courage plays a vital role in the growth of a group and its individual members. Courage has been defined as "a mental act that involves a decision to face and deal with emotional pain as honestly as possible without any guarantee of a positive outcome" (Gans, 2005, p. 575). One courageous act can have a tremendous impact upon the group. Seeing courage makes us more aware of our own fears and shows us a path for facing them. There is hope and comfort in knowing that fellow group members are willing to behave courageously. Lacey recognized a fellow group member's courage (IJD 5.08.1104), "I am glad Sandy shared her frustrated experience in the moment with us all. Wow, what courage!!!" Sandy reflected on just how important this encouragement was to her group experience (ED 18), "The most important thing that I got out of being a participant in this group is the encouragement to be myself. I can't stress strongly enough how significant that is for me." The development and maintenance of courage in the group is illustrated through the following subthemes. See Appendix 1 for selected thick descriptions associated with the theme of courage.

### *Subtheme 1.1 Modeling of Courage.*

A unique aspect of this study was the influence of the professor on the training groups. Early in the semester, she suffered an injury to her ear that caused balance and cognitive deficits. She had trouble hearing and walking, had difficulty finding words to express her thoughts, and felt continually exhausted. However, she continued to teach in the midst of this time of great personal struggle. It was easy for others to recognize her struggle, her perseverance, and most importantly, her courage. Through her modeling, I was inspired to be a more courageous group facilitator. Teresa commented on me as a group facilitator (ED 9), "What I learned from him and what I saw in him that changed was that you don't always have to have all of the answers … Mostly, I admired him for his ability to be honest and open regardless of how we were going to react and then helped us explore what we needed to." While I had always believed in risk-taking, seeing the professor's courage went beyond risk-taking and allowed me to be a different group facilitator. Seeing another's courage gives us a glimpse of our inherent power to be brave in the face of our fears and struggles. Her acts of courage and belief in the power of group certainly influenced the development of courage.

*Subtheme 1.2 Recognition of Courage.*

Courageous acts are present in most groups because someone in the group is usually willing to take a risk. However, acts of courage by themselves are not necessarily powerful. It is the recognition of these acts when they occur that is critical to the development and maintenance of courage. The essence of this subtheme is reflected in Nancy's statement (ED 5), "… my behaviors were recognized by my fellow group members and therefore, I received positive feedback and words of encouragement from my group which prompted me toward more growth." Nancy seems to be suggesting that in absence of encouragement, or being recognized for her courage, she would not have grown as much within the group. Participants frequently used adjectives such as brave and proud in recognizing courageous acts.

Recognition of courage was expressed most frequently through the journaling. Misty said (IJD 8.01.0903), "I thought that Melissa was really brave to say what she did. Melissa – You are a courageous person." Sandy said (IJD 3.27.0900), "Lacey, you were very brave and appropriate in your opening up to the group. I hope that you will continue to do so for your own sake." Nancy recognized another group member (IJD 2.16.0455), "Darren - I don't think you responded negatively last night at all. You said what you felt, whether others like it or not. That was brave in itself. It opened you up to the possibility of getting questioned further, which is what you seemed to want the least." Mary said

(IJD 3.26.1044), “I appreciate her letting us see a glimpse of the person inside. That took a lot of courage that many don’t have.” The recognition of courage occurred most often in the journaling, and it may be that some contextual aspects of the live group provided more limited opportunities for recognizing courage.

In the live group, however, recognition of courage was still apparent. Melissa said (GVT 3), “I know her to be a people person and not say anything bad and just say nice things, so when I read that I was just like, oh crap!, you know, and I was proud of her, I really was proud of her for even just saying I’m pissed off and that was a huge step for her.” Raeona said (GVT 4), “I just think the fact that you haven’t apologized is huge. I mean it sounds like, to me, when you’re talking a lot about being a people pleaser, and you’re saying I may have, you know, pissed some people off but I’m not gonna apologize. I’m just, I’m proud of you.” As the group facilitator I made the following comment (GVT 4), “Misty, you…you took a pretty brave step. I had the feeling that more people feel like you felt.” Brandy said (GVT 9), “When you talk about being strong and how important it is for you to be strong, um, I think in being able to show vulnerability in this group shows strength, shows courage.” Recognition is a major factor in the development of courage within a group.

This subtheme is further supported by examining consequences of unrecognized courage. The following excerpts are from the essay documents, which were written after the group ended. Mary said (ED 11), “I also tried to take a risk in group but when a member asked me a question to put me on the hot seat it was redirected by the group leader. That was very difficult for me that it was redirected and at the time I thought it happened purposely. I was hurt and disappointed but could not get up the courage to discuss it with the leader during group."  Raeona said (ED 4), "Outside of group, I began taking some (positive) risks and challenging myself.  I told the group about these new behaviors, but no one seemed to really respond.  I suppose I was really excited for myself and wanted everyone to be just as excited for me.  After feeling let down, I now see that at this point I began to slowly disconnected myself from the group.  It was as if I was telling myself, "Okay, you made yourself vulnerable to them, you are really trying, but no one is noticing."  I think I subconsciously decided that I was done sharing anything with the group.  I was hurt and didn't like it, didn't want to feel it, so I allowed the hurt to turn to anger."  When courage is not recognized, feelings of hurt and disappointment compromise one's willingness to continue acting courageously.  These responses further demonstrate the importance of recognizing courage.

*Subtheme 1.3 Courageous Contagion.*

When courage is recognized, it becomes contagious.  Some participants suggested that fellow group members' courage influenced them to become more courageous.  Mary said (ED 9), "I felt that if she could take a huge risk then so could I.  The emotions that I was feeling were so intense that I had tears in my eyes during most of the group.  It was one of the hardest times to sit with my emotions because it was so intense and I could identify with them.  I thought a lot about how I could modify aspects of my life to become a more genuine person inside and out."  There seems to be a strong sense of connectedness in the presence of courage.  Darren's statement suggests that one group member's act of courage helped him to be more courageous both within and outside the group (IJD 9.09.0445), "Teresa – I admire you for the honesty and effort you put into trying to experience your emotions.  It is somewhat uplifting to me because I can see that change is possible but maybe not quick. I will continue to express my emotions in group and have put more effort into expressing them with my wife. Thank you." Raeona said (ED 3), "I said nothing in the journals until another member was finally brave enough to express her frustration. This gave me the courage to express some of my feelings too." In the above examples, the participants are motivated through the courage of their fellow group members.

Melissa and Raeona both seemed to find joy in seeing and recognizing courage. Melissa wrote (IJD 1.08.1038), "Those that have overcome their group shyness and anxieties gave me a lot of encouragement and hope. Sometimes you just have to force yourself out of your comfort zone in order to grow and overcome obstacles/fears!" Raeona wrote (IJD 3.27.1112), "Your journal entry made me smile. I have a lot of respect for your honesty and how you didn't apologize for saying how you feel. It gives me courage." Sandy similarly reflected awe (ED 13), "Witnessing a group member deal with confronting feelings, bringing them to the surface, feeling, them, sitting with them and becoming comfortable feeling was an incredible experience. It was like seeing a flower blooming in a time-lapse film. It sounds corny, but it was a real gift to be able to share the experience when group members stretched beyond their comfort levels and grew. It was amazing hearing their stories about how their growth during group impacted their real lives." In moments of courage, there is the promise of change. Courageous contagion, or the therapeutic exchange of courage, can repeatedly stimulate group process.

Courage appears to be cyclical. Participants are initially fearful about initial acts of courage, feel good when their acts of courage are recognized, and are then compelled to be more courageous. Their fellow group members feel inspired by the courageous acts, enjoy recognizing the acts of courage, and are also then compelled to be more courageous.

*Subtheme 1.4 Appreciation of the Recognition of Courage.*

In the moment of a courageous act, one does not typically feel brave but rather intensely vulnerable and even fearful. When their courage was recognized, many group participants expressed gratitude. Nancy said (IJD 7.25.0957), "Raeona - Thank you for your encouraging words. I was surprised that I impressed you and thankful that you were willing to share that with me." Sandy said (IJD 9.10.0107), "Hello everyone, I can't thank you all enough for the outpouring of encouragement. It helped more than I can express." Betsy used the words "thanks" and "encouragement" in the same sentence 11 different times throughout her journaling. The essence of this subtheme is reflected in Teresa's statement (IT 356-361) "… maybe I was finally able to get out of my head, I don't know. But, um, I was able to journal about just my feelings and I remember the response from everybody afterwards of um, being surprised that I was able to do it and proud of me and things like that. It really, it surprised me. I didn't think it was quite as big of a deal at the time, but everybody else's responses, and you know, things like that, really helped me stay on that path of being able to do it." Participants seemed to express gratitude when their courage was recognized by fellow group members.

*Theme 1 Conclusion.*

The development and maintenance of courage contributes significantly to group process, and modeling may be especially helpful in its initial development. While courageous acts occur frequently, they often go unrecognized. The recognition and appreciation of courage requires immediacy and interpersonal sensitivity to suffering and resiliency. As recognition of courage increases so does the number of courageous acts; it becomes contagious. Courage can be profoundly therapeutic, and a group provides an excellent stage for promoting its essence.

*Theme 2. Functions of Journaling in Cyberspace: A New Frontier for Group Process*

One of the ways in which electronic journaling affects group process is the setting of limits. In a typical group, the beginning and end of sessions are well-defined limits. The group facilitator decides when and how frequently the group will meet and how long each session will be. These limits suggest that participation in the group itself is unavailable during the time between sessions. While a typical process group has minimal limitations regarding content and process, it does restrict when they take place for the group as a whole. These basic limitations of a typical process group are challenged when an adjunctive medium with undefined limits, such as electronic journaling, is introduced.

With journaling as an adjunct, new boundaries had to be established. I thought of two ways to create this boundary. I had the option of setting limits for the amount and type of content and/or time involvement. As a group facilitator, my intent was to keep the group experience, including the journaling, as open-ended as possible. I assumed that many of the students would not participate in the journaling if it was not partially required. Thus, I decided to set a minimum lower limit. Group members were asked to spend at least 30 minutes per week reading, writing, and responding to journal entries. No upper limit was placed on time, and no limits were placed on content or process. It was not until I began analyzing the data that I realized how impactful the setting of limits would be for group members.

Beyond limits regarding time and content, other contextual characteristics of electronic journaling are different from a traditional group setting. There is an absence of face-to-face communication and a low likelihood of receiving immediate feedback. Communication is written rather than verbal, and there is time to reflect on and edit what one wants to say. These characteristics are another reason that the journaling represented a new frontier for group process.

Within this theme, the essence of group participation as it is affected by these qualities and their subsequent impact upon group process is explored. In analyzing the data, I had hoped to synthesize an universal essence to the experience of participation in electronic journaling, and initial ‘universal’ themes were developed. These themes were strongly supported by data from about half of the participants, and I began reanalyzing the data for theme reinforcement. Small pieces of data from the remaining participants were found for this reinforcement; however, they did not represent the overall experience accurately. After this post-theme fishing was completed, I was not comfortable proceeding with ‘universal’ themes. In examining new possible synthesis of the data, I discovered that what I initially believed were two different themes more actually represented two different kinds of journaling experiences. In other words, the journaling functioned differently depending upon the participant. In this theme, then, there are two subgroups with accompanying subthemes.

For the first subgroup, participation was enhanced through the journaling due to how it extended group process. Participation in the live group was maintained and deepened through the journaling. For the second subgroup, participation was enhanced through the journaling because it was a more easily tolerated medium for communication.

More could be said in the journaling because there was less anxiety present than in the live group. Both subgroups were able to participate more fully in the overall group experience, but the journaling served different functions. The essence of journaling participation and its effect upon group process is illustrated in the following subthemes. See Appendix 2 for selected thick descriptions associated with this theme.

### *Subgroup 1 Participation Without Limits: Process in Asynchronous Communication*

Setting a minimum limit of 30 minutes for journaling appeared to have a powerful effect upon these group members. The first subtheme (2.11 Active Processing Between Sessions vs. Shutting It Off) for this subgroup reflects how being required to do the journaling seemed to "force" participants to actively process the group experience. Interestingly, these group members did not shut down processing once the minimum requirement was met. Instead, they appeared to create and sustain an attitude of limitless participation. The electronic journaling format did not seem to change the qualities of the group participation but instead extend the availability of group participation. Group participation was extended through two transcendent modalities. In the second subtheme (2.12 Extending the Present), participants described the journaling as a continuation of the here-and-now group experience. In the third subtheme (2.13 Group Never Ended), participants suggested that the journaling provided an ongoing and unending sense of time within the group.

#### *Subtheme 2.11 Active Processing Between Sessions vs. Shutting It Off.*

The majority of participants described a belief that they would tend to disengage from processing the group experience in the absence of the journaling. The essence of this subtheme is reflected in Sandy's statement (IT 291-293), "You know, it kind of, it keeps you active in that processing so you don't shut down the processor in between groups." Raeona described how she believes her participation would have been different in the absence of the journaling (IT 89-96), "I think if I wouldn't have journaled and if I wouldn't had to go online and check the journals throughout the week, that I would have just shut it all off. And not thought about it and just blocked it all out until I had to deal with it again, which you know, would have been less stressful, but um, I don't think I would have benefited as much from it. Um, just like, almost forced me to just really consider everything that was happening in there instead of . . ." Sandy and Raeona both suggested that they would shut off processing during the time between sessions in a typical group. Similar to Raeona, Misty also used the word forced (IT 221-223), "And it forced me to think more about it because a lot times when I would leave, I would think I don't want to think about this anymore … But I would have to think about it through the journaling." Use of the word forced is particularly interesting as it suggests that disengaging from the group process was a naturally occurring tendency. Mary and Melissa suggested that they would forget aspects of the group process throughout the week in the absence of the journaling. Melissa said (IT 95-97), "I think that with the e-mailing and journaling, I think that it intensified the experience. I don't think that I would have gotten as much out of it if you just come in weeks. Cause I think you can kind of forget about it throughout the week." Mary said (IT 58-61), "I thought that [journaling] really helped us to get to know each other on a deeper and faster level than just being in group once a week, because that kind of goes down, you know, you kind of forget about things." Similarly, Teresa reflected on how the time elapsed between sessions affects processing (IT 58-60), "It kept me feeling really connected with the group the whole time, cause I mean, a week between seeing each other, it was awhile." For these participants, there appears to be a pervasive belief that disconnection from the group experience would have occurred in the absence of the journaling.

*Subtheme 2.12 Extending the Present.*

Participants within this subgroup made statements suggesting extension of the present, or continuation of the here-and-now group experience, through the journaling. Sandy said (IT 277, 178-179), "It keeps the group alive past the time of the group … a here-and-now in cyberspace." Sandy seems to characterize the group as a living entity with here-and-now qualities. Teresa said (IT 120-121), "I felt like we were around each other even more, even though we really weren't." Teresa's statement suggests a felt presence of the group beyond physical limits. Melissa said (IT 100-101), "… it was so intense because it could be there whenever you wanted it to be." The reference to intensity suggests that the constant availability of the group was not diluted. Mary said (IT 59-63), "… just being in group once a week, because that kind of goes down, you know, you kind of forget about things, but, if you're interacting online, all those feelings and emotions stay right there with the group … it's just kind of ongoing." Mary's statement is similar to Melissa's in suggesting that the emotional intensity of the group is alive and ongoing. Each of the above participants appeared to experience the journaling as extending the group process without limits. The following journal entry from Teresa exemplifies this subtheme (IJD 9.04.0924):

> "It's been so difficult to not try and figure out what all of the emotions I was feeling last night and now all mean. I wanted to shout that I can handle this, and I don't need feedback. I'm glad Don (facilitator) made me sit with it. Last night, I felt as if someone put me in a snow globe and shook me up and I was floating around waiting to get my feet back on the ground. My heart felt like it was going to pound right out of my chest. My ears were ringing, and I was shaking. To be

> honest I felt as if I was going to either pass-out or throw up. (I still do). I have tears in my eyes right now just hearing in my head what was said to me last night. Darren nailed it when he said "alone". I've never felt so alone as I did last night – within myself … empty. The sadness followed when I said the word outloud. Quickly followed by, "quit feeling sorry for yourself." Pinpointing what it felt like to feel weak is hard, but my initial reaction was and is feeling out-of-control. I felt lost and unsure – inadequate. At the same time a feeling of surrendering or … peace physically came over me. Like, okay, I give up, I'm tired of not being in touch with me, I'm tired of being strong and trying desperately to find all of the answers. This scares me beyond words. I was and am feeling physically and emotionally drained. It's so confusing, I feel scattered and confused and out-of-control but at the same time I feel a calm … I'm crying again … I hear you all telling me that it's okay to not know. For the first time since I was a kid, I feel like I can breathe again. I feel like the muscles in my face have relaxed and I don't have the underlying feeling of anger as my primary emotion. So, what does it feel like to be weak now? Today, thanks to all of you … that weakness feels more like a vulnerability. I'm struggling to believe that these feelings are real, and might stay for more than a day or so."

While Teresa clearly begins by reflecting upon the events of a recent group session in a then-and-there fashion, she quickly transitions into the here-and-now. Her emotional experiencing is present-centered and characterized by nimbleness, intensity, complexity, and authenticity. The sense of the group being present is evident in the above statement, "I hear you all telling me that it's okay to not know." Teresa's journal entry goes beyond a subjective experience of the group as ongoing and provides an illustration of how the journaling extends the live group.

The participant descriptions presented in this subtheme offer insight into the factors that facilitate the experience of extending group process without limits. These factors include: (1) perception that one's ability to participate in the group is not compromised by the medium of communication, (2) a belief that group is available whenever, (3) a felt presence of the other group members, and (4) here-and-now cognitive and emotional experiencing. The next subtheme concerns how frequently group members felt connected to this extension of the group process.

*Subtheme 2.13 Group Never Ended.*

Participation without limits can further be explored in the context of the subjective experience of time. The asynchronous nature of the electronic communication medium meant that journaling messages could be written or viewed at any time as determined by the participant. For some participants within this subgroup, the group process was by neither time nor place. The essence of this subtheme is reflected in Teresa's statement (IT 119), "It was just, group never ended." Sandy said (ED 15), "For twelve weeks, our group experience never stopped. It was as though my group members were with me 24/7." Sandy made a similar comment in the interview (IT 91-92), "It's almost like group never ended. It just went on and on and on." The above participants' statements are powerful partially due to use of the word "never." These statements suggest that not only was the here-and-now group experience accessible but that it was always present. In the prior subtheme, Mary and Melissa's descriptions of the group experience as "ongoing" and available "whenever" provide further support for this theme. In her essay Raeona said (ED 2), "There were times when I stress so much about group throughout the week that I could not concentrate on anything else." This subtheme moves beyond the intermittent ability of the journaling to extend group process and suggests that a felt presence of the group was unending.

*Subgroup 2 Journaling Vs. Live Group Participation: Process in Asynchronous Communication*

In contrast to the previous subgroup, these participants recognized and utilized the contextual variables of the electronic journaling to enhance their participation. The journaling offered a more easily tolerated medium of communication for group participation. The communication medium was important because the anxieties associated with face-to-face group process were frequently experienced as overwhelming and tended to inhibit self-disclosure. The journaling enhanced participation by providing an easier means (2.21 Easier Participation: Absence of Face-to-Face Interaction) for saying more (2.22 Saying More: Self-Disclosure and Openness in the Journaling).

*Subtheme 2.21 Easier Participation: Absence of Face-to-Face Interaction.*

These group members suggested that journaling made it easier to participate more fully in the group process. The contextual variables of the journaling offered a "safer, less scary" and more "impersonal" experience as compared to the live group. In addition, written participation offered an alternative to verbalization. For these reasons, the journaling offered a more easily tolerated means of participation and a break to the intensity of the live group. The essence of this subtheme is reflected in Lacey's statement (IT 158), "… it's an easier, safer, less scary place to do it, by writing it." Darren reflected on the difficulty of participating in the group process (IT 117-118), "It was easier to have courage in the journaling." Nancy contrasted her participation in the live group and the journaling (IT 55-57), "Like, if something bothered me or made me mad during the small group, I probably wouldn't speak up. Um, but I could go home and journal about it." Betsy expressed a preference for writing (IT 72-73), "… it's much easier to put in on paper than it is for me to verbalize it." And in her essay Betsy wrote (ED 2), "I could write out and really think about my responses." For this subgroup, journaling changed the context for group participation.

Participants seemed to attribute easier participation to the absence of face-to-face interactions. The following participant comments focus on this absence: "You're not sitting there face-to-face" (Lacey IT 156); "impersonal nature" (Darren IT 115); "… in front of all of these people" (Nancy IT 210); and "in front of my group so early on" (Misty ED 3). Participation in the live group was limited by discomfort with the face-to-face, continuous feedback quality of the experience, and the journaling offered an alternative. For this subgroup, having time to say things and not facing the threat of immediate feedback were important aspects of saying more through the journaling.

*Subtheme 2.22 Saying More: Self-Disclosure and Openness in the Journaling.*

Participants in this subgroup made comments suggesting that the journaling medium of communication helped them to say more than they would have otherwise. The essence of this subtheme is reflected in Nancy's statement (IT 55), "It allowed me to say a lot more than I would in an actual group." Darren said of the journaling (IT 102), "… it gave me a chance to say things." Lacey reflected on her openness in the group (IT 158-159), "I don't think I would have opened up as much as I did." Betsy said (IT 77-78), "… with the journaling, I am able to do that [say] more." These group members were able to participate more fully in the group experience through the journaling.

Fuller participation was primarily characterized by increased self-disclosure and openness. However, several participants were also able to explore frustration and confrontation through the journaling. Nancy said (IT 210-212), "… I would never, in group, in front of all these people say, you know, stranger, I think you have a problem with me, you know, I'm sensing that, is this accurate?" Lacey said (ED 10), "The interactive journal allowed me to express my frustration with some of the group members after Group 2, which I would probably have decided to keep quiet about without the interactive journal." Misty said (ED 3), " After the first night of class, I journaled about how I felt forced into talking about yourself. I journaled about how I felt like a rebellious, anti-social kid. I would have never been able to say this in front of my group so early on. But I had the opportunity through the journaling." The expression of frustration and confrontation with others is a highly vulnerable act. For those participants overwhelmed by the anxiety of face-to-face group situations, the journaling offered an opportunity to experiment with new group behaviors.

Even more important, participants were able to form connections that might not have otherwise occurred. Two participants from the other subgroup reflected on connecting through the journaling. Melissa said (IT 128-130), "Another thing that … I thought was interesting is that you know with some people you can you connect through I felt like I connected through writing but never face-to-face." Sandy said (ED 15), "A few of the group members felt more comfortable revealing themselves in writing than in person. This permitted us to get to interact with some of the quieter members of the group in ways that we never would have otherwise." These statements are powerful in showing how the journaling enabled fuller participation in the group experience.

### *Divided Subgroups*

The essence of the journaling experience appeared to function differently among two subgroups. It is important to make clear that all group members varied in their level of participation, and each participant could have easily acted in a manner consistent with any of themes at any single point in time. However, in examining the essence of overall participation in the journaling, themes across subgroups became increasingly apparent. The Johari Window serves as a useful tool for describing the different functions of the journaling for the two subgroups.

The Johari Window (Luft & Ingram, 1955) describes four different levels of information sharing that occur between people. The first quadrant consists of information known to both self and others. The second quadrant is information known to others but not the self, and in the third quadrant, information is known to the self but not others. The fourth and final quadrant consists of information unknown to both self and others. While the Johari classification is simplistic, it provides insight into how and why participants had different journaling experiences.

In describing the first subgroup, the fourth quadrant of the Johari Window provides a good fit. It has been called the unknown quadrant and could also be referred to as the quadrant without limits. Material in this quadrant is unpredictable and discovered in the moment; it is a surprise to both the person and other group members. If group related anxiety is too high, it is difficult to engage this quadrant. In this quadrant, the participant is beyond basic group fears and uncomfortable with an inauthentic life. They are just as preoccupied with the discoveries they will make about themselves as they are about how others will react. Spending time primarily concerned with the fourth quadrant appears to lead the participant to experience the journaling as an extension of the live group.

In describing the second subgroup, the second quadrant provides a good fit. It has been called the hidden quadrant and contains information known to oneself but not to others. They are more preoccupied with the reactions others will have than about self-discoveries. There is a fear of being misunderstood and a preoccupation with explaining oneself adequately so that others will understand. Spending time primarily concerned with the second quadrant appears to lead the participant to experience the journaling as an easier way to participate more fully in the group experience.

### *Theme 2 Conclusion*

Electronic journaling is a new frontier for group process. A participant can engage the group at any point in time, and there is always a moment-to-moment possibility of receiving messages from others in the group. In this study, it was left up to the participant as to how and when they would utilize the journaling. Group members could choose to engage the group when they had a new insight or felt emotionally vulnerable. They could choose to engage the group when feelings of anxiety were minimal. Allowing group members to set their own limits encouraged participation. Aside from minimal requirements, the journaling provides freedom. With freedom comes responsibility, and participants chose how intensely they would strive towards personal growth, or their "becoming" in time (Chapman, 1997). The medium of electronic communication can be utilized in many ways. When participants are left to define their own limits, they must take responsibility for their own boundaries or lack thereof. They must decide how willing they are to question the authenticity of their lives not just during sessions but throughout the week. In summary, the journaling provides a new frontier for group process and many opportunities for group participation.

### *Negative Case Analysis*

The interactive nature of the journaling resulted in careful writing behavior for some participants. Cautious journaling appeared to be driven by fears that writing could be easily misinterpreted. Raeona said (IT 100-104), "Well, I would sit there, because I would try to think about everybody and how what I said was going to affect everybody. I would sit there and write, write a draft. And then type in what I really wanted to put, because I did, I wanted to be very careful to say exactly what I meant and not put it in a way that someone else would take it wrong or something like that." Misty said (IT 64-67), "I think I was little more careful after that first time, after I wrote something that kind of stirred some things up, I was a little bit more careful about what I wrote. Um, and in reading other people’s journaling, I would probably read something that they had written, and say ooooh, I hope I don’t sound like that. So I was probably a little bit careful." The tendency to subdue one's entry is reflected in Darren's statement (IT 127-128), "Um, it probably, I probably softened my tone a few times knowing that it was going to everybody." Teresa reflected upon the changes in her journaling as the group developed (IT 144-152), "Um, at first, quite a bit. I really censored myself, I could write, you know, three sentences, and it would take me like thirty minutes because I wanted to be real careful what I was saying, don’t want to step on any toes, didn’t want to share too much. And I was like, and I censored myself probably for quite some time, I would say about six weeks I censored myself. And then when I started becoming more comfortable with the group, more comfortable with my role in the group, I guess, I felt like I was able to write pretty much anything. And I think part of it was becoming ok with being honest with people and knowing that people are gonna have reactions regardless of what I say and being able to deal with that." Participants from each of the divided subgroups made statements reflecting cautious writing at times during the group. This negative case analysis suggests that having a writing audience may inhibit authentic responses. However, filtering one's self-disclosures is mirrored in many group members' participation within a live group situation. The utilization and timing of both interactive and other journaling formats should be carefully considered in future investigations.

*Results Summary*

In the development of themes, the goals were to stay near to participant experiencing and capture the essence of the interactive journaling group phenomenon. Both of the themes examined participant engagement as mediated by the dynamic between safety and perceived risk. A primary purpose of group is to "allow members to explore safely their interpersonal behavior patterns at high levels of risk and responsibility" (Bednar, Melnick, & Kaul, 1974, p. 34). For the first theme, courage was discovered to be central therapeutic factor, which has been defined as "a mental act that involves a decision to face and deal with emotional pain as honestly as possible without any guarantee of a positive outcome" (Gans, 2005, p. 575). The essence of courage is the here-and-now process of risk-taking. For the second theme, interactive journaling was discovered to enhance participation and affect group process in a novel and diverse manner. The divided subgroups within this theme suggest the importance of personal risk and responsibility upon participation in the group. Some group members extended here-and-now processing into cyberspace by internalizing a responsibility of courage. For other group members, the journaling offered safety because of a perceived decrease in public self-awareness. The dynamic relationships between safety and risk-taking and their impact upon group engagement were apparent in each of these themes. In the next chapter, these themes are deepened through theoretical contextualizing. Interpretations and implications of the themes are presented for theory, research, and practice.

## Theme 1 Thick Descriptions

*Lacey (IJD 5.08.1104)*

I felt as Misty did in group, when she said it was hard to hear people raising their tone of voice. I get scared by those "raised tones of voice" as well. It hit me in the same fashion. (If you have grown up with someone yelling at you, it is scary when others do it.) Although, I am glad Sandy shared her frustrated experience in the moment with us all. (Wow, what courage!!!) I know I get scared by "raised tones of voice" because my mother is very blunt and direct and argumentative. I grew up noticing how she hurt people's feelings, so I learned to kind of walk around behind her apologizing for her words.

*Misty (IJD 8.01.0903)*

Watching the exchange between Lacey and Melissa was difficult for me. To some extent, I feel like a peacemaker. I wanted to step in and making everything okay between the two. I felt for both you guys. I could see Melissa's desire to move beyond the surface relationship and go to a deeper level. With my sister, I have this deeper relationship. I can be honest with her, because I know that our relationship is forever. She is a constant in my life, even though sometimes we take breaks from one another. I don't have this kind of relationship with anyone else in my life. It is so difficult to be straightforward without hurting someone's feelings. I hate hurting people's feelings, so a lot of times I choose to be superficial in friendships. Superficiality is easier for me a lot of times. Being superficial means that I don't have to take the time to get to really know someone. I don't have to use energy investing in a relationship that may not be all that. I saw Melissa's desire to invest more in her relationship with Lacey. I thought that Melissa was really brave to say what she did. Melissa – You are such a courageous person. In relationships that I feel are worthy, I feel that I need to take more risks.

*Mary (IJD 3.26.1044)*

Well, I have thought alot about what happened in group. My emotions were running wild after group. It was difficult to sleep that night thinking of things. I feel so horrible that I did not realize where Melissa was coming from. It just clicked after Albert started asking us why we didn't rescue her. I definitely felt more open in group than the first one. It was difficult because in the first group I felt myself thinking about things and not letting myself get on an emotional level. This last group I tried something new by feeling those emotions. It was hard. True, I don't have a clue about what Melissa was feeling during that time but I can relate. Whether she felt a connection or not, I did. I have thought alot about group dynamics. I believe that everyone is being genuine and trying to be a part of the group. I understand that it is difficult for some to talk more because I am usually one of those people. I have become more comfortable within the group and am learning to let some of my guards down. Melissa is a very strong person.

She has a beautiful heart and I appreciate her letting us see a glimpse of the person inside. That took a lot of courage that many don't have.

*Mary (ED 9)*

For me, one of the most powerful emotional moments happened during group 9. One of the participants shared her struggles throughout this semester within herself. There were many traits within herself that I identified with but had never thought about before that moment. This group member is such an inspiration to me. I looked up to her and that way she progressed throughout this process. I felt that if she could take a huge risk then so could I. The emotions I was feeling were so intense that I had tears in my eyes during most of the group. It was one of the hardest times to sit with my emotions because it was so intense and I could identify with them. I thought a lot about how I could modify aspects of my life to become a more genuine person inside and out. There are many times outside of group with clients that I tell them I feel stuck or sad for them but I don't allow myself to feel those feelings with them. I am scared to show my vulnerable side but after this group I have become more at ease with it. The participant in group stated that she felt vulnerability is weakness, which is the same way I feel. I examined myself and realized this belief is false. Vulnerability shows more strength than denying your feelings. This is a great lesson that I have learned because of the participant willing to take risks.

*Sandy (IJD 9.10.0107)*

Hello everyone, I can't thank you all enough for the outpouring of encouragement. It helped more than I can express. I'm sorry I've not written earlier. I checked the board and got your posts, but I have not had one piece of time to think and respond. And even if I was not exhausted and brain-dead at this moment, I doubt that I would be able to express what your support has meant to me. I am feeling so much better. The anger subsided after I expressed it. In fact, except for the rough night right after the group, I've felt pretty good. I am learning a lot about recognizing, feeling and expressing my own emotions. You guys help me by challenging me (anger issues, anyone?!), by sharing yourselves and by and modeling (Teresa, you are such an inspiration!). Sometimes the answers to my struggle with feeling and dealing seems so simple to be silly. Then why is it so complicated?! I must go finish my work now (huge project due in the morning). I'll see you all in group. Thank you again.

*Raeona (ED 4)*

I started trying new behaviors inside and outside of group. Inside group, I was more willing to make comments and show support in person instead of only in the journals. Outside of group, I began taking some (positive) risks and challenging myself. I told the group about these new behaviors, but no one seemed to really respond. I suppose I was really excited for myself and wanted everyone to be just as excited for me. After feeling let down, I now see that at this point I began to slowly disconnect myself from the group. It was as if I was telling myself, "Okay, you made yourself vulnerable to them, you are really trying, but no one is noticing". I think I subconsciously decided that I was done sharing anything with the group. I was hurt and didn't like it, so I allowed the hurt to turn to anger.

## Theme 2 Thick Descriptions

*Teresa (IT 111-128)*

Journaling, at first I kind of looked at it like another task, something else that I have to do. It was like homework, oh my god, it's one more thing that I have to make sure that I get done. Um, and then I was really appreciative of the journaling. It kept me, cause I was in the interactive group, it kept me feeling really connected with the group the whole time, cause I mean, a week between seeing each other, it was awhile. And just, I don't know, I don't guess I realized how much I was going to think about class after I had left class. And being able to communicate with the others openly, whether it was asking questions, making comments, observations, you know, sharing something I've learned about myself and wanting feedback. It was just, group never ended. And for me, it really added to my trust level of the rest of the group members. I felt like um, I felt like we were around each other even more, even though we really weren't. But I really felt like we were, we stayed connected. And we kept each other of what was going on. And I found myself being more ok with sharing things about myself and sometimes confronting others through the journaling. And I think I did it more through the journaling at first and then became more comfortable with it in group itself. I find that to have been a very valuable piece of the group itself, was just being able to, no matter what time of day, no matter when, um, being able to get on there and know that there were other people around.

*Sandy (IT 175-180)*

The interactive journaling was, like I said, it was a communication vehicle with the rest of the group. And it was reacting to other people in the group. So, so it was like a continuation of the process of the process group. That back and forth sort of, if, it's funny to think that you can have a here-and-now in cyberspace, but there really was sort of a here-and-now going on in that interactive board in cyberspace. It's kind of strange to think about that.

*Sandy (IT 277-293)*

It keeps the group alive past the time of the group. So it, it almost takes away the time restriction of being in a group for two hours. It, so it, it lengthens your time of involvement not just um, the time that it takes you to do the journaling either. Thinking about the issues of the group, reacting to what people are, have said or have written, and it gives you chance to kind of think about your own reactions to those things. And then to respond and to write about those reactions. So I think it allows a deeper, um, a chance for just a really a deeper processing of what is going on. That you don't have right there in that moment, you know there's certainly value if you can have that immediate reaction but if you can have that AND you can have the week of sort of reflecting and some interaction over um, the interactive journal, I think that's useful too. Just kind of keeps that thought process going because otherwise it's really easy for me to go to a group for two hours, leave it, never think about it again until I walk into it the next week. And I can do that with individual therapy too, cause you know if there's stuff going on, you don't want to think about, you just leave, shut it off, close that door, gone for a week. Yet it's so useful if you keep marinating on some of those things. You know, it kind of, it keeps you active in that processing so you don't shut down the processor in between groups.

*Mary (IT 56-63)*

We got more out of journaling too, because there's things you might not have said for various reasons. Um, we kind of had sessions, or groups, online. And I really liked that part. I thought that really helped us to get to know each other on a deeper and faster level than just being in group once a week, because that kind of goes down, you know, you kind of forget about things, but, if you're interacting online, all those feelings and emotions stay right there with the group, you know, it's not just you cut yourself off after a week, you know, it's just kind of ongoing. So that was the good part.

*Melissa (IT 95-103)*

I thought about that a little bit. I think that with the e-mailing and journaling, I think that it intensified the experience. I don't think that I would have gotten as much out of it if you just come in weeks. Cause I think you can kind of forget about it throughout the week. But, well, we had to do it during the week, I would feel the same anxieties going in just reading e-mails. And I feel it just getting people's feedback. So I think that it almost, and maybe that's why it was so intense because it could be there whenever you wanted it to be. But I think that at the end I got more out of it. And was able to maybe, like intense therapy versus just the slow process of it. And plus I think that you can say some things in journaling that you couldn't verbalize.

*Raeona (IT 89-96)*

GGGoooohhh. It kept me stressed out. No, it was a good thing. Um, it was actually a really good thing for me because going back to that, you know, trying not to let things bother me, which you know, I think if I wouldn't have journaled and if I wouldn't had to go online and check the journals throughout the week, that I would have just shut it all off. And not thought about it and just blocked it all out until I had to deal with it again, which you know, would have been less stressful, but um, I don't think I would have benefited as much from it. Um, just like, almost forced me to just really consider everything that was happening in there instead of . . .

*Nancy (IT 55-61)*

It allowed me to say a lot more than I would in an actual group. Like, if something bothered me or made me mad during the small group, I probably wouldn't speak up. Um, but I could go home and journal about it. And say, this is how I really felt, or, it gave me more time to process things, you know, lots of times, I'd rather think on it before I say it, just so it doesn't come out wrong, or offend somebody or upset somebody.  So, it gave me days, if I needed, before I said it.  And sometimes, the more I thought about it, I didn't want to say that anymore, so I'm glad I didn't go ahead and say it.

*Lacey (IT 155-159)*

Well, um, I think that I probably, I did open up a little more in the journaling because it is kind of a safe place.  You're not sitting there face-to-face, and if that's something that is difficult for you to do, to be genuine and honest if someone, if you're wanting to confront someone, that's an easier, safer, less scary place to do it, by writing it.  And so, um, I think that I wouldn't have opened up as much as I did, which sounds scary.

*Betsy (IT 71-78)*

Oh, it was good, because I'm a writer and um, very much so.  And so, it's a lot easier for me to put what's going on in my head and my heart and inside and all that, it's much easier to put it on paper for me than it is to verbalize it.  I can still verbalize it, but I just feel like I don't do this, even when I'm contradictory in my journaling, which I know I was a couple of times, um, I would be even more so if I hadn't journaled it.  And, um, you know, eventually I would get to the point of, you know, I would just give up.  I can't explain this to where it's going to make sense, but with the journaling, I'm able to do that more.  So, it's a good component.

*Darren (IT 114-118)*

It was a, a positive for me because some things were easier to journal, because of, in a sense, you know, the impersonal nature of it that I could put out there.  And then, it's like it would already be there, and then if it came up in group, you know, that was great.  But it wasn't like sitting there trying to, in group, or trying to get the courage to say.  It was easier to have the courage in journaling, I guess, as well, is the way I'd put it.

# CHAPTER V

# CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how interactive journal writing affects group process and learning from the training group experience. The meaning, structure, and essence of this phenomenon were examined for 11 counseling students. Two major themes emerged in analyzing the data. First, journaling in cyberspace emerged as a new and complex frontier for group process. This broad theme was directly focused on the journaling aspects of the group experience. Second, courage was discovered to be a crucial therapeutic factor in the dynamics of the group experience. Although the journaling was helpful in supporting this theme, courage appears to be an important group dynamic without regard to the type of communication medium. Through evaluation of the nature of the experience in conjunction with the above themes and their implications, the following research question is answered: What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the interactive journaling group experience?

In exploring the meaning of this phenomenon at the most basic level, all participants reported that many aspects of group process were "deeper" and occurred "quicker" as a result of the journaling. In a study with comparable research design, Haberstroh and colleagues (2006) found that participants similarly emphasized how journaling contributed to the depth of experiencing. A number of studies have suggested that the amount of group members' verbal participation is related to enhanced group process (e.g., Bunch, Lund, & Wiggins, 1983; Roark & Sharah, 1989). Although writing is not oral, the journaling did increase the depth of participation and self-disclosure. The findings of the current study generally suggest that interactive journaling accelerates and deepens group participation. A phenomenological study goes beyond this level of general meaning and seeks to address *how* and *why* the journaling had this effect.

At a structural level, the journaling provided a means of engaging members in the group. Rather than knowing that participation in the group would not occur until the next meeting a week later, participants were asked to read the leader summary shortly following the session and to check-in with the group throughout the week. In Subtheme 2.11 *Active Processing Between Sessions vs. Shutting it Off*, participants clearly described a belief that they would have tended to disengage from the group in the time between sessions in the absence of the journaling. Engagement is an important concept in assessing group participation which has traditionally been associated with group climate (Johnson et al. 2005). Macgowan and Newman (2005) examined the factor structure of group engagement and found that the following five factors provided the best fit: (1) working on other members' problems, (2) working on one's own problems, (3) contributing, (4) relating to other members, and (5) relating to the work of the leader with alphas of .96, .93, .90, .90, and .86, respectively. In this study, the journaling provided participants with early and frequent opportunities to stay active in group process, which seemed to increase the level of group engagement. An implication of this finding is that group engagement may dissipate in the time between sessions within a traditional group structure. Structure within groups has historically been implemented through either pregroup or in-group formats (Kaul & Bednar, 1986). The current findings suggest that "out-of-group" structuring formats need to be explored for how they affect group engagement.

Beyond opportunity for group engagement, the structural qualities of journaling are well-suited for illumination of group process. Yalom emphasized that two primary functions of his written summaries were process illumination and cognitive integration (Yalom, Brown, & Bloch, 1975). In the live group, the facilitator(s) must choose where to focus attention amongst the many complex dynamics occurring during any one moment. The journaling offers both group members and the facilitator an opportunity to interactively reflect upon and interpret group dynamics. Rather than making quick decisions about how to respond within a live group situation, the journaling offers an opportunity to reread a message before responding. Both the quantity and quality of the writing provides rich information about members' investment in the group, how they experienced the group's interactions, and the internal processing of group dynamics. For example, does a group member feel the need to address every member in the group? How much of the journaling is self- or other-focused? Are journal entries written globally or only to certain members? If a group member was a focus within a session, the absence of a journal entry is telling. The answers to these types of questions provide insight into the process of the group as a whole and to the interpersonal tendencies and patterns of each person. Online journaling offer flexible and frequent opportunities for illuminating group process. The unique structural aspects of online journaling are a departure from traditional group approaches and represent a new frontier for group process.

### *Journaling in Cyberspace as a New Frontier for Group Process*

Interactive journal writing represents a new and complex frontier for group process; it is a unique communication medium because there are so many decisions to be made by the participant as to how and when the journaling will be engaged. This complexity is apparent in the divided manner participants chose to engage the journaling. For one group of participants, the journaling appeared to extend the group. The intensity and aliveness of the group experience was relatively undisturbed by the transition between the live group and journaling. Spatial and temporal extension of the group occurred without limitations. For the other group of participants, the live group was overwhelming and the journaling represented a more easily tolerated medium for communication. The journaling provided a less anxious space and time condition of heightened private and reduced public self-awareness, resulting in more intimate self-disclosure and overall participation. The spatial and temporal flexibility of journaling in cyberspace is one reason that it represents a new and complex frontier for group process.

### *Spatial and Temporal Extension of Group Process*

> *Every society can be characterized by its position in time and space. New meanings of time and space were central to the cultural change from agricultural to industrial societies, and the current shift into a networked or informational society brings time and space into focus again (Gotved, 2006, p. 467).*

The subthemes of *Extending the Here-and-Now* and *Group Never Ended* are interrelated and reflect a transcendence of spatial and temporal orientation. In order to understand the essence of these subthemes, externally defined linear notions of time and causality must be suspended. Elaborating on the inaccuracy of a reductionistic acceptance of this linear view as objective reality is beyond the scope of this study.

Rather, time and causality are conceptualized as internally derived conscious experience, which influences subjective perception.

Working in the here-and-now has been defined as therapeutic attention focused on being temporally present and spatially proximal (Slife & Lanyon, 1991). The current findings suggest that here-and-now experiencing in the live group propelled participants towards being open to the possibility of here-and-now in cyberspace. In other words, subjective experience of the here-and-now alters spatial and temporal orientation, leaving the participant open to the spaciotemporal characteristics of online asynchroncous communication. There are many unknowns associated with the asynchronous nature of the interactive journaling. Spatially, a participant could be online with one or more group members at the same time without knowing it. Temporally, one could write and/or receive a message at any point in time. Sense of time is further distorted because there is no perceivable motion of the journal messages in space. “The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place” (Giddens 1990, p. 18). Gotved (2006) predicted that time and space will lose significance as communication technology penetrates everyday life. Rather than group being available at defined moments in space and time, it was up to participants to define and limit the availability of the group. If limits regarding access to the group remained undefined, there was a subjective experience of the group as unending. Haberstroh and colleagues (2006) concluded that the journaling medium uniquely extends the boundaries of group counseling. The participants who chose not to limit their experience in this study entered an extended here-and-now in cyberspace, going beyond the expectations of this investigator and the current literature on computer-mediated communication. In summary, the group was fully available at any moment, including the here-and-now.

### *Openness and Self-Disclosure through the Journaling*

The subthemes of *Easier Participation* and *Saying More* are also interrelated. In their investigation of journaling as an adjunct to group counseling, Haberstroh and colleagues (2006) found *Increasing Personal Voice and Reflection* to be a major theme. This finding illustrated how the journaling medium helped participants to communicate and think more fully about the group. Safety was a significant aspect of this finding as reflected in the following participant statement, “I think it made me braver to say it, because I wasn’t afraid of losing my control of my emotions in front of them. I wasn’t afraid.” The following statement from the current study is similar, “It was easier to have courage in the journaling” (Darren, IT 117-118). The safety of the journaling prompted less anxious and more self-disclosing participation. In the following paragraphs, the development of anxiety in a group will be examined as to how it impacts self-disclosure, and the electronic journaling medium will be explored as to how it engenders a safer environment.

The unstructured early sessions of an interpersonal process group often lead to anxiety and even fear for many group members. There is a risk in self-disclosing as it is difficult to manage the impression projected to others. For some group members, intense state anxiety during these early sessions restricts intimate self-disclosure. In comparing high anxiety and low anxiety conditions, Wittmaier & Radin (1978) found that there was a greater level of intimacy in self-disclosures in low anxiety conditions. While it is an important goal of group therapy for members to confront this anxiety and become more comfortable self-disclosing over time, if the anxiety is too high or self-esteem too low, avoidance may occur as precious group time passes (Goldstein, 1978). Anxiety occurs on a continuum and when it is too high, group participation is limited.

The primary characteristic of the journaling that contributed to increased feelings of safety appears to be the absence of face-to-face interaction. In addition, the asynchronous nature of electronic journaling offers the participant time to think out responses and relief from the fear of immediate feedback. In addition, writing is more reflective in nature than verbalization. McGrath and Berdahl (1998) examined the use of Computers as Communication Systems (COMM) in group work. COMMs were reported to have a democratizing influence, resulting in greater participation among group members who were more inhibited in face-to-face interaction. Consistent with Haberstroh and colleagues (2006), the journaling helped participants to increase self-disclosure, developing a more active voice in the group.

The asynchronous structure of electronic journaling is unique because it offers group interaction characterized by low public self-awareness and high private self-awareness. In investigating public self-awareness (high and low) x private self-awareness (high and low), Joinson (2001) found that heightened private self-awareness and reduced public self-awareness were associated with significantly higher levels of spontaneous self-disclosure. Furthermore, a high level of private self-awareness has been found to increase self-disclosure and salience of one’s physical and affective states (Franzoi & Davis, 1985; Scheier, 1976); journaling is known to heighten private self-awareness (Hiemstra, 2001; Holly, 1989). The journaling in this study allowed group members to feel connected to the group in a time and space consisting of heightened private and reduced public self-awareness, resulting in increased intimate self-disclosure.

Journaling represents a new frontier for group process in many ways. The above theme emphasizes how the flexible spatial and temporal characteristics of journaling in cyberspace can affect group process. The journaling medium provides participants with repeated opportunities to express “things left unsaid” (Greenberg, 1981; Wheeler & Kivlighan, 1995; Wright et al., 1985). Group boundaries are extended through the journaling, offering more opportunities for illumination of group dynamics as a whole and for individual interpersonal tendencies and patterns. It appears that the dynamics of interactive journaling are just as complex as the live group. In fact, they appear to mirror each other in their flexibility and degree of the unknown. Journaling is a unique medium for communication, representing a new frontier for group process and requiring a new set of knowledge and skills.

### *Courage as a Therapeutic Factor*

> *“There is no answer to the question of life except courage in the face of what is”*
> - Carl Goldberg (1980, p. 127)

In this study, courage also emerged as a distinct theme. Each of the four underlying subthemes of courage reflected an interpersonally-situated phenomenon. Modeling (Subtheme 1.1) is important for demonstrating the act of and potential for courage. Recognition (Subtheme 1.2) is important in developing and maintaining one’s willingness to continue acting courageously. Appreciation (Subtheme 1.4), or gratitude for recognition, reinforces the perceiver of the courage and the importance of courage to the group as a whole. Contagion (Subtheme 1.3) is a reflection of each of these processes and emphasizes the sociomotivational aspects of observing courage. In this chapter, the theme is situated and interpreted within the literature on courage.

Existential philosophers have thoroughly explored the concept of courage. Tillich's writings on courage may be the most essential due to the centrality and depth of the concept in his teachings. As a religious philosopher, Tillich (1952) emphasized existential courage so greatly that he regarded it as the best possible definition of faith. He defined courage as "self-affirmation of being in spite of nonbeing" with further elaboration as the "readiness to take upon oneself negatives, anticipated by fear, for the sake of a fuller positivity" (p. 78, 86). Heidegger (1952) and Frankel (2002) similarly emphasized the dialectic between authenticity and inauthenticity, and Rollo May (1983) examined multifaceted courage as the key to overcoming fear, anxiety, and despair, considered to be byproducts of the inauthentic life. Another way in which courage has been defined is as a "dialectic term capturing the tension between the poles of fearlessness and fearfulness, assertion and withdrawal, spiritual movement and spiritual paralysis, wisdom and ignorance, hope and despair" (Cuff, 1993, p. 2). Group therapy provides an excellent ground for engaging the courage dialectic. Seeing fellow group members discover and challenge previous limits and future possibilities makes it difficult to avoid awareness of one's own inauthenticity. The overall theme of courage as an essential ingredient in striving towards growth is supported by existential philosophy and therapy.

The existentialists provide substantiation for the overall theme of courage. However, specifically addressing the overall structure of courage and its subthemes in this study requires further theoretical contextualization. As stated earlier, the structure of courage appeared to be interpersonally-situated. The first known qualitative study on courage asked participants to describe in as much detail as possible a situation in which they experienced courage (Asarian, 1981). Based on the results of his investigation, Asarian (p. 135-136) summarized the structure of courage:

> "Courage is an intended, arduous, behavioral commitment to values despite formidable conflict, fear, and suffering – including death if need be – for the intersubjective significance and intrinsic worth these values are perceived to possess . . . It is a radically social phenomenon whose theoretical foundation is grounded in the perception of a significant other . . . This mediational process has at its roots a dialectical intertwining of the actor, his world and, most importantly, others such that the actor is bringing meanings to the situation by standing out for what he values. The situation is simultaneously offering signification by forcing the actor to go beyond an idealistic interpretation of his values and face them as a web of unclear intentions" (p. 135-136).

Asarian clearly concludes that the structure of courage is both interpersonally-situated and fundamentally an interpersonal process. Other qualitative studies have examined the specific interpersonal processes involved in the development of courage.

Finfgeld (1999) conducted a meta-interpretation of courage based on six qualitative studies involving participants aged 14 to 94 who experienced lingering threats to their well-being. She concluded that two interpersonal factors, role models and gestures of support, were essential to sustaining courage. The modeling of noncourageous behavior was emphasized to be just as important as courageous behavior. Gestures of support were described to include expressions of respect and admiration (Asarian, 1981; Haase, 1985) and validation and affirmation (Cuff, 1993). The findings of Finfgeld's meta-interpretation unquestionably coincide with the current study. Modeling from the group professor, myself as a group facilitator, and the group members was a major factor in the development and maintenance of courage within the group. Recognition was the largest subtheme of courage and consisted mainly of validating words of encouragement. Under the subtheme of Contagion, participant statements frequently included the words *respect* and *admire*. The final subtheme of Appreciation is not reflected in Finfgeld's results. However, Finfgeld primarily focused on one-way encouragement, from health care providers to their patients. In situations where social roles are similar, appreciation may occupy a more prominent role. In this study, appreciation served to further illuminate the importance of encouragement to the group. Based upon Finfgeld's meta-interpretation, it seems that many of the same interpersonal processes important in health-care settings transfer well to a group therapy setting.

Group therapy is fertile ground for the emergence and maintenance of courage. Gans (2005) suggested that courage is at the center of psychodynamic group therapy but frequently overlooked in group research, theory, and practice. Gans defined courage within the small group context as "a mental act that involves a decision to face and deal with emotional pain as honestly as possible without any guarantee of a positive outcome" (p. 575). Similar to previous investigations of courage, Gans emphasized the role of courage recognition and suggested that group facilitators are often less likely to recognize courage than are their clients. Goldberg (1980) similarly suggested that clients need courage rather than ideas from their therapist. Early leader modeling is critical to promoting the development of courage and its recognition, and then as the group becomes cohesive, this task becomes a group member responsibility. "A trusting, cohesive group encourages – lends courage, as it were – to its members who now speak more easily about feelings and reactions that they previously had been careful to avoid" (p. 585). Gans established the direct relevance of courage to group work and highlighted its curious absence in research and practice.

The premise of this theme is that courage is a crucial therapeutic factor in small groups. Therapeutic factors have been defined as healing properties that characterize the complex change process in groups, and courage would appear to satisfy every aspect of this definition (Yalom, 1995). Courage is vital to the life of the group throughout its development. The act of joining a group is itself courageous (Gans, 1995; Mullan, 1992). Entering and maintaining a here-and-now focus (Bacha, 2001), emotional processing, intimacy (Goldberg & Simon, 1982; May, 1983), and exploration of the unknown also require courage. A single courageous act can have a tremendous impact upon the group. Seeing courage makes us more aware of our own fears and shows us a path for facing them. In this study, for courage to emerge as a central theme of group dynamics amongst many other possibilities, it is clear that the concept of courage deserves greater recognition and investigation regarding its role in group process.

### *Limitations*

The findings of the current study have several important limitations. Because this is a phenomenological study that seeks to describe process, structure, and the experiences of participants, generalizability is a major limitation. First, journaling as the variable of interest in this study was purposely unstructured, making it difficult to define and replicate the procedures involved. Second, depending on the level of analysis, the current study was limited to either 11 individual participants or a small group case study. To determine if the findings of the current study are applicable in other settings, the researcher, teacher, or clinician should determine the degree of similarity in purpose and contextual factors. Another important limitation of this study was the dominance of females in the sample. The current findings could be mediated by sex interaction effects.

Because I was group facilitator in the study, my biases and subjectivities may have had a significant impact on the manner in which participants experienced the phenomenon. In addition, there were not multiple perspectives on interpretation of the data. Conclusions from the current study are tempered by these limitations.

### *Implications and Suggestions for Future Research*

#### *Integration of Communication Mediums.*

This study uniquely combines group counseling, expressive writing, and technology and suggests that they can be skillfully integrated. While research contrasting face-to-face and computer-mediated communication has been conducted adnauseam, investigations integrating these two communication mediums have been grossly lacking (McGrath & Berdaul, 1998). Successful integration requires a dynamic fit between task and technology (McGrath & Hollingshead, 1994). The integration of group therapy, expressive writing, and technology in this study provided an excellent fit for the task of experiential education of group dynamics in a 16-week period. Furthermore, task-technology fit must account for group structure and member composition. Other important variables include time (e.g., length of group, duration of sessions) and group member experience with the technology being utilized. Another example of integration is Future research should focus on carefully planned integration of face-to-face and computer-mediated communication mediums. The current study suggests that this interaction effect should be studied more extensively.

#### *Computer-Mediated Communication Research.*

Qualitative inquiry is a promising method of examining the complexities inherent to computer-mediated communication. In this study, the theme of electronic journaling as a new frontier for group process was characterized by prominent differences in how participants tended to experience the phenomenon. In other words, the findings suggest that a reductionistic framework may be limiting. Finfgeld (2000, p. 252) suggested that "all but a few" of the researchers in this area have conducted analyses with predefined dichotomous categories that fail to account for the complexity inherent to computer-mediated communication. Lyytinen and colleagues (1994) concluded that research on computer-mediated communication has been focused on specific technologies rather than group dynamics. Qualitative inquiry is especially suited to deepen understanding and describe processes. More of this research is needed to provide the necessary theoretical grounding for more relevant quantitative studies in computer-mediated communication.

### *Journaling and Research on Group Dynamics.*

Electronic journaling may be more than an adjunctive clinical intervention; it may be an effective and noninvasive method of conducting research on group dynamics. In the current study, the theme of courage emerged largely from close examination of the journaling. The recognition of courage as a subtheme had limited presence in the live group but was immediately obvious in the journaling. The finding of courage as a crucial group therapeutic factor in the current study coincide with Gans' assertion (2005) that rarely has a concept so central to practice of group therapy been so overlooked in both research and practice. Journaling may amplify certain group dynamics and provide greater clarity regarding the presence and meaningfulness of some group processes.

### *Therapeutic Group Work Implications.*

An important consideration in the current study is the applicability of findings to the different types of groups. The sample for this study was a training group of 11 master’s level counseling students. While there is some variation in approaches to training groups, most share a common structure similar to the one in this study including 12±4 members, a group facilitator, and a focus on the here-and-now (Smith, 1980). From a training perspective, journaling as an adjunctive strategy intensifies experiential group learning and illuminates group process within the relatively limited time of a 16-week semester. Intensification of learning about group counseling is highly desirable because most students will facilitate groups based on knowledge from a single class. It is likely that the current results would transfer well to other counseling groups. However, it is difficult to determine how well these findings would transfer to other types of groups, including group therapy, task and work groups, and psychoeducational groups. Several studies have provided evidence that training group experiences do not have different characteristics than group therapy in general (Kirsh, 1974; Lieberman & Gardner, 1976; Noll & Watkins, 1974). The scope and depth of processing in this study appeared to mirror many aspects of group therapy. Composition is critical in any group format, and the cognitive and emotional functioning of potential members must be considered. Because this study took place as a part of a class within an educational setting, some of the findings may transfer well to psychoeducational as well as task and work groups. However, it is more likely that the structure of the journaling would need to be adapted to the desired purpose and outcome. Online journaling is a highly flexible communication medium that demonstrates promise as adjunctive strategy in group work and should be examined across different group types.

Ward (2003) suggested that choosing not to integrate technology with group work is no longer a viable option due to the permeable presence of technology in everyday life.

There are a number of important technology issues facing the field of group work. However, this study is particularly relevant to the researcher or practitioner skeptical of how computer-mediated communication could possibly carry the same power as an interpersonal process group. Many practitioners, including this investigator, are skeptical of how technology will affect the therapeutic relationship and even more so of how it will affect interpersonal process within a group (Rees & Stone, 2005). The findings of the current study that some participants experienced extended here-and-now processing through the journaling suggest that profoundly authentic and intimate communication can occur via an unstructured electronic journaling medium within a FTF-CMC integrated format. The findings also suggest that journaling may be especially helpful in the working through interpersonal anxiety more efficiently. This investigator advocates initial technology integration with group work at a local level as a method for learning how to use technology and for ensuring its safety and effectiveness.

*Multicultural Implications.*

Finally, the use of technology in group work has the potential to better meet the needs of diverse and underserved clients. First, online support groups consisting of people from across distant geographic regions can form homogenous bonds. Clients experiencing highly stigmatized conditions such as HIV, AIDS, cancer, eating disorders, and physical disabilities are unlikely to seek traditional group therapy (Caplan & Turner, 2005). Group environments where a particular cultural background is dominant are likely to be avoided or less helpful to people of minority racial and ethnic backgrounds. There is also research suggesting that online forums would increase the participation of men in therapeutic groups (Finn & Lavitt, 1994; Klemm et al., 1998; Salem et al., 1997).

In considering FTF-CMC integration, imagine how stereotypes, biases, devaluation, avoidance behaviors, etc. might be affected by interacting online for six weeks prior to meeting face-to-face. There is considerable potential for technology to serve the needs of diverse and underserved clients.

### *Summary*

The purpose of this study was to explore how interactive journal writing affects group process and learning within a therapeutic group. A qualitative investigation was conducted to explore the meaning, essence, and structure of the interactive journaling group experience for 11 counseling students. The four sources of data analyzed included live group transcriptions, journaling documents, interviews, and essays written by the participants. The findings suggest that group counseling, expressive writing, and technology can be successfully integrated. Interactive journaling appeared to accelerate and deepen the group experience. For some of the participants, the journaling extended spatial and temporal group boundaries. For other participants, the journaling functioned to decrease anxiety, resulting in greater self-disclosure and overall participation. In addition, courage emerged a crucial therapeutic factor in the group's development. Interactive journaling is a powerful adjunctive communication medium with a promising future in practice of group interventions.

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## APPENDIX 1.1

## INFORMED CONSENT

### A. AUTHORIZATION

I,___________________________, hereby authorize or direct _Allen Eason, BA_, or associates or assistants of his or her choosing, to perform the following treatment or procedure.

### B. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AND ASSOCIATED RISKS/BENEFITS

The name of this research project is Interactive Journaling as an Adjunct to Groups in Applied Psychological Training. It is being conducted through Oklahoma State University in the School of Applied Health and Educational Psychology. Allen Eason is a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology and will be supervised by Dr. Don Boswell, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology. The purpose of this research project is to examine the effects of journaling upon counselor training groups. Your participation is being asked for in an effort to improve training groups in counseling here at OSU and around the country.

As the lab component of CPSY 5583 Group Process, students are required to participate in a 14-week training group, meeting weekly for 1 hour. All groups are in the format of interpersonal growth groups, and group leaders are doctoral students in the Counseling Psychology program at OSU. In addition to the normal class requirement, participation in this study includes being randomly assigned to one of two groups. Each group will include journaling, expected to require an additional 30 minutes of participation per week. The two groups are: (1) interactive journaling in combination with a training group, and (2) personal journaling in combination with a training group. Two questionnaires will be given that deal with group processes and interpersonal learning. Participants will be asked to complete 1 short questionnaire following each group that should take no more than 5 minutes to complete. Participants will also be asked to complete a medium-length questionnaire following every 3rd group that should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. All of the above data will be collected via blackboard, an interactive content system commonly used in OSU classes. The blackboard site for this project has been programmed to minimize exchange of user information and protect confidentiality. All groups will also be videotaped; these are being used for research analyses only. Videotaped groups will be viewed by advanced counseling psychology students in their last year of training at OSU; the tapes will be rated based upon group processes and interpersonal learning. All participant data including video recordings will be locked and secured in the Counseling Psychology

Clinic at OSU-Tulsa and will be destroyed when the study is published. The OSU IRB has the authority to inspect consent records and data files to assure compliance with approved procedures. As a requirement of the class, the number of group sessions attended will be reported to the professor as an evaluation of attendance resulting in a participation grade. No other information will be used to determine the participation grade. Participants may experience some personal and/or interpersonal distress as a result of participating in the group experience, a class requirement. This may occur as people begin to share personal experiences as well as hear other group members' experience. This is not atypical for people who participate in group counseling. No additional risks are anticipated as a result of any of the research conditions. Specific psychological benefits from this research project may include gaining intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and better organization of thinking processes. The investigator plans to write about the information collected from this study and publish an article in an academic journal. The data collected are confidential and all data will be written up so that no individual participant will be identified. Written feedback will be provided to you at the completion of this study if you desire. Although there are minimal psychological risks of participating in this study, if you experience any undue discomfort or anxiety as a result of your participation, your group facilitator or Allen Eason or his designated representative will be available for consultation. Referral for individual counseling is available. Allen Eason can be reached at (405)880-7384. Dr. Donald Boswell, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology, is the primary investigator's advisor and can be reached at (405)744-9454. For information on subjects' rights, contact Dr. Carol Olson, IRB Chair, 415 Whitehurst Hall. Phone: 405-744-1676. Additional contact: IRB Executive Secretary, Oklahoma State University, 203 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. Phone: 405-744-5700.

**C. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I will not be penalized if I choose not to participate. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and end my participation in this project at any time without penalty after I notify the project director.

**D. CONSENT DOCUMENTATION FOR WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT**

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ____________________________ Time: _________________________ (a.m./p.m.)

________________________________________________________________________________

Participant's Name (printed) Signature

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Date: ____________________________ Time: _________________________ (a.m./p.m.)

________________________________________________________________________________

Evan Allen Eason, Primary Investigator Signature

APPENDIX 1.2

## INFORMED CONSENT ADDENDUM.

### A. AUTHORIZATION

I,___________________________, hereby authorize or direct _Allen Eason, BA, or associates or assistants of his or her choosing, to perform the following treatment or procedure.

### B. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AND ASSOCIATED RISKS/BENEFITS

Two new methods of data collection have been added to the research project you are currently participating in entitled Interactive Journaling as an Adjunct to Groups in Applied Psychological Training. As a component of CPSY 5583 Group Process, you are required to write a paper about what you have learned throughout the course. I am requesting permission to examine the contents of your paper. Your name will be marked through with a permanent black marker by the professor and replaced by the ID number you have had throughout the experiment. I am also asking for volunteers to participate in a 1-hour interview with myself. In the interview, I will be asking questions about your group experience and how it has affected you. What you choose to reveal is entirely up to you. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All participant data including the recordings will be locked and secured in the Counseling Psychology Clinic at OSU-Tulsa and will be destroyed when the study is published. The OSU IRB has the authority to inspect consent records and data files to assure compliance with approved procedures. No risks are anticipated as a result of your participation in these additions to the experiment. The investigator plans to write about the information collected from this study and publish an article in an academic journal. The data collected are confidential and all data will be written up so that no individual participant will be identified. Written feedback will be provided to you at the completion of this study if you desire. Allen Eason can be reached at (405)880-7384. Dr. Donald Boswell, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Counseling Psychology, is the primary investigator's advisor and can be reached at (405)744-9454. For information on subjects' rights, contact Dr. Carol Olson, IRB Chair, 415 Whitehurst Hall. Phone: 405-744-1676. Additional contact: IRB Executive Secretary, Oklahoma State University, 203 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. Phone: 405-744-5700.

### C. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

I understand that my further participation in this research has no connection to grading. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I will not be penalized if I choose not to participate. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and end my participation in this project at any time without penalty after I notify the project director. Please check one of the following options concerning your participation in an interview and permission to view your paper.

___ I consent to both the interview and having a copy of my final paper examined.
___ I consent to the interview but do not give consent for my final paper to be examined.
___ I consent to my final paper examined but do not give consent for participation in an interview.

## D. CONSENT DOCUMENTATION FOR WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ___________________________ Time:
(a.m./p.m.)

_________________________________________________________________________

Participant's Name (printed) Signature

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Contact Information

Printed Name: ____________________________
Phone Number: ___________________________
E-mail: ____________________________

**Contact information will be detached from informed consent and stored separately. Contact information will be shredded upon completion of an interview or a decision to not participate. This informed consent addendum will be stapled to the back of the original consent form.*

# APPENDIX 2.1

## SCRIPT

My name is Allen Eason, and I'm a doctoral student in counseling psychology. I am inviting you to participate in a research project called Interactive Journaling as an Adjunct to Applied Psychological Training. As you know, participation in a training group is a requirement of this class. I would like to talk to you about the possibility of some of the groups in this class being part of an experiment. The purpose of the research project is to examine the effects of journaling upon training groups. I'm asking for volunteers to participate in a 14-week training group, meeting 1 hour weekly. As a participant, you would be randomly assigned to one of three groups. All groups will be in the format of interpersonal growth groups. Two of the groups will include journaling, expected to require an additional 30 minutes of participation per week. OSU's blackboard system will be used for journal entries. In one of the groups, journaling will be interactive, meaning participants would write to and respond to one another. The group leaders will be doctoral students in Counseling Psychology at OSU. All groups will be held at the Counseling Psychology Clinic here at OSU-Tulsa. Two short surveys will be given to all participants following groups that deal with group processes and interpersonal learning. All sessions will also be video-taped for the purpose of research analyses only. All subject data, including video recordings, will be locked and secured in the Counseling Psychology Clinic here at OSU-Tulsa and will be destroyed when the study is published.

Participants may experience some personal and/or interpersonal distress as a result of participating in a group experience. This may occur as people begin to share personal experiences as well as hear other group members' experience. This is not atypical for people who participate in group counseling. No additional risks are anticipated as a result of any of the research conditions. Specific psychological benefits from this research project may include gaining intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and better organization of thinking processes. I plan to write about the information collected from this study and publish an article in an academic journal. The data collected are confidential and all data will be written up so that no individual participant will be identified. Written feedback will be provided to you at the completion of this study if you desire. If you choose to participate in this study, your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point without penalty or bad feelings.

## APPENDIX 2.2

## SCRIPT

I appreciate your participation this semester in the research project titled: Interactive Journal Writing as an Adjunct to Groups in Applied Psychological Training. Initial analysis of the data has led the research team to complex results. To increase the depth of the data and to confirm results, I am asking for volunteers to participate in a 1-hour interview with myself. If you choose to participate, I will be asking questions about your experience within the group and how it has affected you. I am also asking if you would be willing to allow me to examine your final paper for the class that is related to your group experience. Your name will be marked over in black marker by your professor. The ID number you have used throughout the term will be written on the top of the page in its place. No grading information will appear on the copy given to the investigator. Your participation in either of these additions is completely voluntary.

## APPENDIX 3.1

## GROUP EXPECTATIONS

Purpose/Rationale:

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of journaling on training groups among counselors in training. The rationale of the group is to provide practical training experiences. Learning is experiential with a process focus. The primary task of group members is to learn as much as possible about the way each relates to each other person in the group. Your participation in the group allows you to observe, participate in, and understand group process. As much as possible, the group is intended to be unstructured, spontaneous, and freely interacting. This allows for a maximal level of group processing.

Participation:

You agree to participate in a group experience for 90 minutes every week for the Fall 2004 semester. Your consistent attendance is very important. Expectations of participation include:

(1). A willingness to invest oneself emotionally in the group

(2). To disclose feelings about oneself and other members

(3). To explore areas in which one would like to make personal changes

*As a participant, it is up to you to decide the degree to which you will share and what content you wish to share.

Respecting Right to Privacy:

It is important to respect group members' right to privacy. We want to encourage group members to participate. However, each person has his/her own way of sharing. It is expected that group members will attempt to respect a diversity of participation. At the same time, it is normal to expect that the facilitator and group members may ask you about your opinions and experiences.

Confidentiality and its Limits:

For group members to speak freely, they must have confidence that their statements will remain within the group. It is expected that what is shared in group stays in group. It is inappropriate to discuss specific group dynamics outside of the group experience. It is also inappropriate to reveal the identities of the group members and the specific issues that are discussed in group. It is acceptable to share what you are learning about yourself with others outside of the group. However, it is hoped that you will share this information with the group. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in groups. Confidentiality may be broken without prior consent only in extremely rare situations where (1) maintaining confidentiality would clearly be of danger to a group member, (2) maintaining confidentiality would clearly be of danger to others, (3) information is subpoenaed in legal proceedings, and/or (4) the information is required by law to be reported (e.g., knowledge of child abuse). It is understood that the group facilitator may be legally required to break confidentiality in cases where there is a threat of harm to self or others. As a member of this group, you agree to respect the confidentiality of all group members. You agree not to discuss any group issue, including the names of the other group members, outside of the group. Failure to abide by these guidelines may result in being asked to leave the group.

### Subgrouping:

It is understood that subgrouping is strongly discouraged. However, if subgrouping occurs, it is important for this issue to be discussed in the group. For example, if two or more group members meet outside of group to discuss group dynamics in general or what they are personally learning from the group experience, it is expected that these individuals will bring this up in the following group meeting.

### Conflict and/or Discomfort May Be Part of the Group Experience:

The group facilitator will work to provide as safe a group environment as possible. Group members understand that part of group development may involve periods of conflict.

### Supervision:

The group facilitators agree to uphold the highest standards of confidentiality and professionalism. They will be supervised by a faculty member in Counseling Psychology to help them improve their group facilitation skills.

## APPENDIX 3.2

## JOURNALING INSTRUCTIONS

### Purpose of Journaling and Week 1 Reflections

(1) Encourage between-session processing of the group experience.

(2) Supplement and enrich the face-to-face interactions that spring from the live group experience.

(3) Encourage preparation for the next session.

(4) Build meaningful connections between what is learned or experienced in group and their personal lives.

The journaling format will be open-ended. It is expected that each student will spend an average of 30 minutes per week reading, writing, responding to journal entries.

### Tips for Journaling

The journaling format is open-ended. You may respond however you like.

There are no requirements for length. It's expected that you spend between 20-30 minutes writing. Your journaling should somehow relate to your group experience.

You are certainly free to journal whenever you like. Good times for journaling might be:

(1) directly following the group when everything's fresh.

(2) when you have an a-ha moment, or insight.

(3) when you experience an event, especially an interpersonal one, that's related to your group experience.

(4) when you're thinking about or preparing for the upcoming session.

Try to include AFFECT in some of your journal entries.

# VITA

Evan Allen Eason

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: INTERACTIVE JOURNAL WRITING AS AN ADJUNCT TO TRAINING GROUPS

Major Field: Counseling Psychology

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, the son of Rev. William Alfred and Melissa Ann Eason.

Education: Graduated from Arkansas School for Mathematics and Sciences, Hot Springs, AR in May 1996; received Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Hendrix College, Conway, AR in May 2000; completed the requirements for APA accredited internship through the Oklahoma Health Consortium, Norman, OK in July 2008. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy or Education in your Counseling Psychology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2008.

Experience: Teaching, Counseling, Assessment, Research, Administration.

Professional Memberships: American Counseling Association, Graduate Student Member, Association for Specialists in Group Work, 2004-present. American Psychological Association, Graduate Student Member, Division 17 Counseling Psychology, Division 49 Group Psychology and Psychotherapy, 1998-present.

Name: Evan Allen Eason Date of Degree: July, 2008

Institution: Oklahoma State University Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: INTERACTIVE JOURNAL WRITING AS AN ADJUNCT TO TRAINING GROUPS

Pages in Study: 119 Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Counseling Psychology

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to explore how interactive journal writing affects group process and learning within a therapeutic group. A qualitative investigation was conducted to explore the meaning, essence, and structure of the interactive journaling group experience for 11 counseling students. The four sources of data analyzed included live group transcriptions, journaling documents, interviews, and essays written by the participants.

Findings and Conclusions: The findings suggest that group counseling, expressive writing, and technology can be successfully integrated. Interactive journaling appeared to accelerate and deepen the group experience. For some of the participants, the journaling extended spatial and temporal group boundaries. For other participants, the journaling functioned to decrease anxiety, resulting in greater self-disclosure and overall participation. In addition, courage emerged a crucial therapeutic factor in the group's development. Interactive journaling is a powerful adjunctive communication medium with a promising future in practice of group interventions.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Donald L. Boswell