Relationship factors and outcome in brief group psychotherapy for depression

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Relationship Factors and Outcome in Brief Group Psychotherapy for Depression

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology)

from

University of Wollongong

by

Trevor Patrick Crowe, BSc (Hons)

Department of Psychology

2005
Declaration

I, Trevor Patrick Crowe, certify that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology) in the Department of Psychology, University of Wollongong, does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person where due reference is not made in the text. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Trevor Patrick Crowe

12th July 2005
Abstract

Relationship factors such as a psychotherapy group's cohesion and interpersonal climate have been touted as being analogous to the therapist-client alliance in individual psychotherapy, and as such should predict treatment outcome. However, predicting and explaining contributors to outcome in group psychotherapy remains unclear. This series of studies examined therapist-client alliance, group cohesion and climate, self-other differentiation processes (using a repertory grid method) and mastery of Core Conflictual Relationship Themes (CCRT) in brief dynamic group therapy for depression. These studies also integrated qualitative-phenomenological and clinical-quantitative research methodologies to examine in detail significant helpful and hindering psychotherapy events. It was found that therapeutic alliance is not analogous with group cohesion, but is associated with group member's engagement in therapeutic tasks. Perceived levels of conflict and group developmental processes helped explain the dimensions of cohesion. How group members defined themselves in relation to others meaningfully changed over therapy. Changes in perceived conflict in the group, and an individual's mastery of their CCRT patterns predicted outcome. In particular, through the experience of telling their stories, clients were able to change their responses to conflicts both within the group and in their wider interpersonal circle.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge, and express my gratitude to, my supervisor Associate Professor Brin Grenyer. I have gained considerably from Brin in relation to guidance in: conducting and understanding research projects; supervision of Clinical Psychologists; understanding Supportive Expressive Dynamic psychotherapy; understanding psychotherapy research; and general academic issues. I would also like to acknowledge the guidance and support of Mr Peter Caputi in relation to the statistical methodologies utilised in this thesis. In relation to the depression treatment project from which the data in this thesis was drawn, I would like to acknowledge the team of Clinical Psychologists who participated in the project and who provided the clinical interventions. Similarly, I would like to acknowledge the people struggling with depression who agreed to participate in this project and who allowed me the opportunity to try to understand better some of the issues related to the treatment of depression. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family generally for their support during the period of completing this thesis and in particular my wife Helena, my son Jamie and my daughter Alexandra, who have endured my moodiness, preoccupation, and at times unavailability.
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Preface

My interest in exploring what makes psychotherapy work stems from both my history as a clinician and my curiosity regarding the relationship between interpersonal processes, being human within a collage of experiential and interpersonal worlds, and mental health and behavioural issues. I also have an interest in exploring the similarities and differences between different therapeutic approaches (including both individual and group therapy) and their theoretical and philosophical underpinnings. This led me to the desire to gain a better understanding of the so called ‘common factors’ of psychotherapy and how they might be better understood and enhanced within a range of clinical settings.

This thesis focuses on aspects of the interpersonal interactions within group therapy treatment for depression. More specifically, it examines the potential associations between relationship phenomena and therapy outcome and attempts to elaborate this in terms of how individual experiences of therapeutic relationships may be influenced by previously adopted interpersonal relationship patterns.

More recently I have become more familiar with ‘recovery literature’ which describes people’s experiences of recovery from mental illness. Although recovery stories have become a catalyst for change (or at least reflection) in terms of how services are delivered, research exploring the intricacies of therapeutic interactions and their relationship with individual recovery processes is in its infancy.

It is my intention in this thesis to straddle qualitative-phenomenological with clinical-quantitative methodologies to examine individual recovery processes within the context of the dynamics and developmental processes of group psychotherapy for depression.