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EXPERIENCES OF POST-PROCESSING IN GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Dedication

To the 12 participants whose experiences are described in this work. Thank you for your time, interest, and willingness to share. Your contributions to this project are invaluable!

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Abstract

EXPERIENCES OF POST-PROCESSING IN GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

By Karen A. Muehl, M.S.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009

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This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological research approach (Moustakas, 1994) to examine the question *How do group psychotherapy clients experience post-processing?* The conceptual framework for the study was Yalom's interpersonal process approach to group psychotherapy (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Participants were 12 university counseling center clients who were members of an interpersonal process-oriented psychotherapy group at a large urban university. Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews. Data analysis procedures followed recommendations by Smith and Osborn (2003) and Creswell (2007). In order to increase the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, the researcher engaged in reflexive journaling, member checking, and the use of two external auditors. Results of the study are presented as a description of how participants experienced post-processing, and are organized within two domains: (a) Experiences of post-processing; and (b) Contextual pieces. Within the first domain, eight categories emerged: (a) verbal report card; (b) silent observer phenomenon; (c) leader

expertise; (d) emotional homework; (e) light bulb moments; (f) validation and reinforcement; (g) connections; and (h) final chapter experiences. Categories were made up of one or more related themes. Within the second domain were four related themes: (a) intensity or depth; (b) outside stressors; (c) group constellation; and (d) time in group. Quotes from participants are included to illustrate the findings. The role of the researcher as an instrument in the study is described. The results are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework of the study and the existing literature. Implications for research and practice of group psychotherapy are identified. Strengths and weaknesses of the study are included, as well as suggestion for future research.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Group therapy is a widely used treatment modality across college campuses, with approximately 81% of university counseling centers offering some type of group services each semester (Colbs, 2003). Among counseling centers that offer groups, approximately 32% provide process-oriented therapy groups (Colbs). One highly regarded approach to process-oriented therapy is Irvin D. Yalom's interpersonal process-oriented group therapy (Yalom, 1995; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). As part of this model, Yalom recommended that the training of new group leaders begin with observation of experienced therapists leading groups (Yalom & Leszcz). Following the group session, it is suggested that the leaders and the trainee-observer hold a 30- to 45-minute post-group meeting for didactic purposes, in which group themes, interaction patterns, and behaviors of the group members and leaders are discussed (Yalom & Leszcz). In one variation of the post-group discussion method, leaders may invite group members to stay and listen silently to the conversation. Yalom referred to this technique as "end-of-meeting review" (Yalom & Leszcz, p. 504). Throughout the present study this technique is referred to as *post-processing*.

Yalom and Leszcz (2005) described the utility of post-processing for training new group leaders to become "constructively transparent" as they comment on the group in the presence of the members (p. 547). In regard to the clients, Yalom and Leszcz wrote the following about post-processing: "...it conveys a sense of respect for the client as a

full ally in the therapeutic process. It also demystifies therapy: it is a statement that therapy is a potent, rational, collaborative process...” (p. 547). Yalom and Leszcz also acknowledged that, “The post-group discussion becomes part of the therapy itself as the observers’ and therapists’ comments evoke feelings from the group members” (p. 548). However, there is very little empirical literature that has examined these theoretical suppositions.

There is a large body of literature on feedback in group psychotherapy, as well as on Yalom’s therapeutic factors. A small set of studies has explored the use of a trainee-observer (i.e., process observer) in interpersonal therapy groups. This work has examined perceptions of the process observer by group members (Bieschke, Matthews, Wade, & Pricken, 1998; Bloom & Dobie, 1969), and techniques related to the process observer model (e.g., use of process notes; Falco & Bauman, 2004; Hogan, Harris, & Cassidy, 2006). There are no recent studies that have explored how therapy clients experience the post-processing conversation.

The present study will be a contribution to the literature because the experiences of psychotherapy group members during post-processing are described in depth. Specifically, the research question for the present study was: *How do group psychotherapy clients experience post-processing?* This study is a qualitative research project that employed phenomenological methods to explore group psychotherapy clients’ experiences of listening to post-processing conversations. The phenomenological approach is consistent with the philosophical and theoretical assumptions of the interpretative paradigm for qualitative research (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The

interpretive paradigm and the phenomenological approach to qualitative research are discussed in further in the next chapter.

The method chapter describes procedures for recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The results are presented as a description of the categories and themes that emerged from individual interviews with 12 participants who had been in interpersonal psychotherapy groups in which post-processing was utilized. Quotes are used to illustrate the experiences of the participants. Finally, the findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework of the study and the existing literature.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter begins with an overview of commonly occurring mental health issues among students seeking help at university counseling centers and the services that such agencies typically offer. Group counseling as a treatment modality for university counseling center clients is discussed. Next, the conceptual framework of Yalom's interpersonal process group therapy is reviewed. The history of post-processing is described, followed by a review of the recent research on interpersonal process group therapy. Next, an overview of the uses and goals of qualitative research is provided. The interpretive paradigm and the phenomenological approach will be discussed in greater depth with particular attention to why the present research question was best explored using this type of inquiry. Finally, the significance of the study is summarized.

Client characteristics and services offered at university counseling centers

University and college counseling centers typically provide a wide range of services for their clients as well as the campus community. Services may include: individual, couples, and group counseling; career counseling; crisis coverage and on-call availability; outreach programming; consultation and referral services; and training activities. According to the International Association of Counseling Services, Inc. (IACS), approximately 9% of college and university students utilized counseling center services in the past year (Gallagher, 2008). Among those students, 58% reported that counseling helped them remain enrolled in school, and 61% indicated that counseling helped with their academic performance (Gallagher).

The American College Health Association (ACHA) reported in the 2007 National College Health Assessment summary that the most commonly reported mental health concerns among students were depression (18%) and anxiety (13%; ACHA, 2007). College students reported also stress (34%), sleep difficulties (25%), concern about a family member or friend (19%), relationship difficulties (16%), death of a family member or friend (10%), and alcohol use (7%) among the top 10 most common impediments to academic performance (ACHA). Counseling centers are prepared to address these issues, as well as a wide range of psychopathology.

The presenting concerns of university counseling center clients have been summarized in several studies (e.g., Erdur-Baker, Aberson, Barrow, and Draper, 2006; Lucas & Berkel, 2005). Lucas and Berkel (2005) named interpersonal problems, difficulties with work or school, career uncertainty, anxiety, and depression among commonly reported presenting problems at one large, urban university. Erdur-Baker and colleagues (2006) conducted a factor analysis using multi-site data from the Presenting Problems Checklist. They found that the prevalence of psychopathology in student clients was best described by five factors. *Academic concerns* included difficulties such as time management, study skills, reading skills, decision-making, and career planning. *Relationship and adjustment issues* included dissatisfaction with peer relationships, trouble making friends, and problems with roommates. Symptoms of depression ranging from suicidal feelings to problems coping with a breakup were captured as *depression and romantic relationship issues*. Concerns related to sexually transmitted diseases, sexual function, and sexual identity comprised the *sexual issues* factor. A factor labeled

eating concerns included symptoms of anorexia and bulimia, and body image concerns (Erdur-Baker et al.).

There is a widely held belief that the severity of psychopathology among counseling center clients is increasing. Ninety-five percent of counseling center directors agreed there was a continuing trend toward a greater number of students with severe pathology on campuses (Gallagher, 2008). Counseling center directors reported that 49% of clients in the past year had serious psychological problems, such as chronic impairment or severe distress associated with depression, anxiety, panic attacks, suicidal ideation and other conditions. Sixteen percent of clients in the past year were referred for a psychiatric evaluation, and 26% of clients were taking psychiatric medication (Gallagher). Although there has been a debate in the literature, empirical evidence strongly supports the perception that there has been an increase in both the severity and chronicity of presenting problems seen at university counseling centers over the past two decades (e.g., Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003; Erdur-Baker et al., 2006; Lucas & Berkel, 2005; Pledge, Lapan, Heppner, Kivlighan, & Roehlke, 1998; Schwartz, 2006).

Accordingly, 67% of directors reported an increase in provision of crisis counseling services at their agency within the past year (Gallagher, 2008). Several changes in counseling centers have also occurred in recent years following the Virginia Tech tragedy. Directors reported an increase in calls from faculty and staff wanting consultation about students of concern, an increase in funding for counseling centers, and greater involvement in campus safety committees (Gallagher). Although demand for

counseling center services appears to be increasing, there is a limit to the extent of services such agencies are able to provide. One third of counseling centers (34%) operate within a short-term therapy model in which students are eligible for a limited number of sessions per year (Rando, Barr, & Aros, 2007). As a result, students requiring intensive, long-term counseling are often referred to off-campus providers.

Group therapy is shown to be an efficient and cost-effective treatment modality in outpatient settings (Burlingame et al., 2004) such as university counseling centers. However, survey data suggest that counseling centers are under-utilizing group therapy. Group counseling is offered at most university counseling centers (81%; Colbs, 2003). Although directors of counseling centers believed that an average of 33% ($SD = 21.7$) of the clients are “best served” by group therapy, the actual percent of clients who received group therapy is only 7.5% ($SD = 10.27$; Colbs). This is regrettable given that group counseling is as effective as, if not more effective than, individual counseling (Barlow, Fuhriman, & Burlingame, 2004; Burlingame, MacKenzie, & Strauss, 2004). The gap between research and practice in group psychotherapy is the focus of recent literature.

Psychologists are increasingly favoring evidence-based treatment approaches to clinical work (Klein, 2008). Group psychotherapy researchers have worked to establish standardized assessment measures for evaluating the effectiveness of group psychotherapy (e.g., CORE Battery and CORE-R; Burlingame et al., 2006). As a result of several decades of research on interpersonal process-oriented psychotherapy groups, a set of *Practice Guidelines for Group Psychotherapy* were recently published (Bernard et al., 2008). The *guidelines* were created by a task force of 11 leading scholars,

researchers, and practitioners of group psychotherapy in order to bridge the gap between research and practice. The resulting document is a comprehensive set of guidelines for evidence-based practice of group psychotherapy (Bernard et al.).

The types of clients who have the most success in these groups were described in the *Practice Guidelines* (Bernard et al., 2008). Specifically, clients presenting with interpersonal difficulties or pathology, or clients who recognize the interpersonal underpinnings of their presenting problem, are best suited for group. Additional criteria include clients who: lack self-awareness in relationships; are action-oriented, motivated, attracted to group, and psychologically-minded; and who possess the capacity for interpersonal learning. Clients who are likely to participate actively through self-disclosure are good candidates for group psychotherapy (Bernard et al.).

In a college or university population, adequate cognitive abilities for group engagement are generally assumed to be present. Also, a substantial portion of counseling center clients present with interpersonal problems or with psychopathology that is developed and maintained in interpersonal interactions (e.g., symptoms of depression and anxiety, problems with peer relationships, breakups and romantic relationship concerns, and stressful family dynamics). The *Practice Guidelines* also note that there are many clients who may not fit these criteria, but who would receive therapeutic benefits from group psychotherapy (Bernard et al., 2008).

Much of the research that was the basis for the *Practice Guidelines* is rooted in the theoretical approach to process-oriented group therapy articulated by Irvin D. Yalom (Yalom, 1995; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Yalom's theory describes the role of group

leaders and members in forming relationships that foster the therapeutic factors that operate as agents of change. The present study used Yalom's approach as a conceptual framework.

Conceptual framework

Yalom's interpersonal process approach to group psychotherapy is based on 11 "therapeutic factors" that generate beneficial change in groups (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 1). The factors are: (a) instillation of hope; (b) universality; (c) imparting information; (d) altruism; (e) the corrective recapitulation of the primary family group; (f) development of socializing techniques; (g) imitative behavior; (h) interpersonal learning; (i) group cohesiveness; (j) catharsis; and (k) existential factors. Yalom and Leszcz elaborated briefly on the first seven factors and devoted entire chapters to the factors of interpersonal learning and group cohesiveness. An overview of each factor is provided.

Instillation of hope may occur as new members hear other group members discuss their successes, or may be imparted by the therapist's attitude and expectations that group therapy is an effective treatment modality (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

Universality provides clients with a sense of relief that they are not alone with their feelings or "unique in their wretchedness" (Yalom & Leszcz, p. 6). *Imparting information* is comprised of didactic instruction provided by the group leader, as well as direct advice from others. Notably, research has shown that direct suggestions are one of the least helpful mechanisms of therapeutic change (Yalom & Leszcz). The therapeutic factor of *altruism* is based on the belief that people benefit from giving as well as receiving; specifically, that the experience of providing support and encouragement to

others may increase one's own sense of worth. The *recapitulation of the primary family group* may occur when group members behave toward one another or the leaders in ways that imitate dynamics from their families of origin. It is the responsibility of the therapist to ensure that harmful conflicts are relived *correctively* to provide the client with a therapeutic relational experience. The *development of socializing techniques* refers to the opportunity to learn basic social skills or increase the sophistication of one's interpersonal skills as a result of interacting in the group. *Imitative behavior* refers to clients' assimilation of the therapist's behaviors, such as listening skills, diction, or non-verbal communication (Yalom & Leszcz).

Interpersonal learning is a cornerstone of Yalom's theory (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). It incorporates assumptions and concepts from the work of previous developmental and interpersonal theorists (Yalom & Leszcz). Like Harry Stack Sullivan before him, Yalom considered interpersonal relationships to be the basis for psychological symptoms as well as the vehicle for change. It is the task of the therapist to identify maladaptive relating patterns as they play out in group and to "mediate therapeutic change in the individual" (p. 19). Yalom viewed the group as a "social microcosm" in which group members could give and receive feedback in order to gain insight and participate in a corrective emotional experience (p. 19). Interpersonal learning usually occurs when an individual displays interpersonal pathology in the group then uses feedback and self-observation to become more self-aware and sensitive to the impact of his or her behavior on others. Yalom emphasizes the importance of both

insight and emotional experience as critical components of interpersonal learning (Yalom & Leszcz).

Yalom defined *group cohesiveness* as a sense of belonging among members, or “the attractiveness of a group for its members” (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p. 55). He considered group cohesiveness to be one of the most important therapeutic factors for two reasons: (a) it provides group members with the feeling that they are supported and valued, and (b) it must be present in order for the other therapeutic factors to operate. Group cohesiveness can be thought of as analogous to the therapeutic alliance in individual therapy (Yalom & Leszcz).

The remaining therapeutic factors are catharsis and existential factors. *Catharsis* refers to experiencing and expressing feelings. Yalom considered catharsis necessary but not sufficient for change based on research suggesting that catharsis must be accompanied by some form of cognitive learning in order to be beneficial (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). *Existential factors* is the label Yalom applied to a set of themes including responsibility and loneliness, and issues such as mortality and unfairness. Research conducted by Yalom suggested that group members highly value the attention of group toward existential factors (Yalom & Leszcz).

It is considered the task of the group therapist to facilitate the emergence of the therapeutic factors using various techniques, such as working in the “here-and-now” and process-illumination (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p.141). *Process* refers to the way in which group members relate to one another and to people outside of group. Process-illumination consists of: (a) recognizing interpersonal processes and how they may

influence other people's perceptions as well as the group members' self-perception; and (b) helping group members become aware of this process (Yalom & Leszcz). Process-illumination is considered essential to the development of the group as a whole so that therapeutic social interactions can take place and provide beneficial interpersonal learning to group members (Bernard et al., 2008).

Process-illumination may occur through comments made by therapists during group, or may be facilitated by having a *process observer* in group. Process observers are silent members of the group leadership team. The process observer does not speak during the group sessions. Instead, he or she is encouraged to take notes on the dynamics and interactions occurring during the group, with a particular eye toward how the process may inform or clarify what is happening on the content-level (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). For example, the process observer may name themes that he or she noticed, patterns of relating, evidence of progress made by group members, or group norms. The process observer may later summarize the group content and salient processes in a written *process note*. Yalom recommends sharing process notes with group members prior to the next session in order to help facilitate process-illumination (Yalom & Leszcz).

Additionally, process-illumination may occur during post-processing (also called *end-of-group review*) conversations between the co-therapists and the process observer (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Inviting group members to listen silently during the post-processing conversation is also meant to demystify therapy and convey respect to the members as equal partners in the therapeutic process (Yalom & Leszcz). Yalom further suggests that post-processing creates an excellent forum for the group leaders to model

effective interpersonal interactions (Yalom & Leszcz). In addition to the supposed benefits to the clients, post-processing is useful for leaders-in-training to practice being “constructively transparent” (Yalom & Leszcz, p. 547). Process observation is usually the first step in training new group leaders in the interpersonal process model.

Although there is some empirical literature on the use of process notes in group psychotherapy (e.g., Hogan, Harris, & Cassidy, 2006), there is very little on post-processing conversations. However, prior to discussing the literature, it is important to understand how the technique of post-processing developed.

History of post-processing

The technique of post-processing originated in the late 1940s through the work of Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT; Benne, 1964). Lewin, whose work was often aimed at solving social problems, has been called the father of ‘action research’ because he believed that all research should include action and all action should be used for research. Following World War II, leaders from different academic and professional fields sought to apply scientific findings to relevant social problems, with the hope of improving the general quality of life after the war (Benne). Specifically, the Connecticut Interracial Commission and the Department of Education were interested in facilitating compliance with the Fair Employment Practices Act among local professionals, as well as easing interracial tensions within the community. The two organizations came together to sponsor a series of leadership training workshops for interested members of the community. The workshops were

conducted by training leaders Kenneth Benne from Columbia University, Leland Bradford from the National Education Association (NEA), and Ronald Lippitt from MIT.

Kurt Lewin and Ronald Lippitt conducted research on the effectiveness of the workshops with funding from the Research Center for Group Dynamics at MIT. The training workshops were held on the campus of State Teacher's College in Connecticut in the summer of 1946 (Benne, 1964). Teachers, social workers, business professionals, and other community members who were interested in participating were placed in small groups of 10 members each. A graduate student attended each workshop as a silent research observer; then, at the end of the meetings, there was a discussion between the leaders and the research observer about the behaviors of the group members, interactional processes between the group members and leaders, and behaviors of the group as a whole (Benne).

One evening, Kurt Lewin arranged for a meeting among the research observers and group leaders in order to discuss and analyze the observations that had been made so far (Benne, 1964). The meeting was underway when some of the group members learned about it and asked to attend. The group members found it enlightening to hear their own behavior being discussed and to reflect on their interactions with others. Lewin began holding post-group conversations every evening and eventually nearly all the workshop participants attended. Situations ensued in which a research observer would report his observations and a group member would respond by claiming that the observer's account was wrong. The other group members then offered their experiences of the event, which often reinforced the initial statement of the research observer, and helped the group

member to recognize faulty or inaccurate perceptions. Lewin recognized the power of these here-and-now discussions by group members about their own behavior and saw that this type of dialogue might be an excellent means for “re-educating” people on their own behavior and heightening interpersonal awareness (Benne).

These meetings were the forerunner for Lewin’s concept of laboratory-style training groups in which behavioral change could result from group members participating non-defensively in a discussion of the interactions in the here-and-now (Benne, 1964). Lewin called this *feedback*, a term he borrowed from the field of electrical engineering (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Lewin believed that behavioral problems were caused by individuals’ perceptions, assumptions, and feelings concerning events and people around them, which could be altered through feedback. The construct of feedback is one of Lewin’s most enduring contributions to the behavioral sciences. In the research on group counseling, feedback has received more attention than any other variable (Kivlighan & Luiza, 2005).

As a result of the powerful impact of the feedback meetings during the workshops in 1946, another set of workshops was planned. This time, the workshops included a small ongoing group called a Basic Skills Training (BST) group. The workshops, held in Bethel, Maine from 1947 to 1948, were sponsored by a grant from the Office of Naval Research and were run by the National Training Laboratories (NTL). The NTL opened in 1947 as a non-profit organization within the National Education Association (NEA; Greiner & Cummings, 2004). Researchers from Teacher’s College at Columbia University, Cornell University, Springfield College, and the University of California

joined the effort. The BST groups featured an “anecdotal observer,” who made observations that the group would use for discussion and analysis (Benne, 1964, p. 89). One of the functions of the group leader was to help the group in analyzing and evaluating the data provided by the observer and to bring the group members’ attention to “the operation of the group as a whole” (Benne, p. 89). One of the training leaders, Leland Bradford, wrote the following about the role of the group observer: “In a typical basic skill-training group the observer...would report his observations to the group. These would stimulate discussions and help the group probe more deeply into its own processes” (Benne, p. 90). Unfortunately, Lewin did not live to see the BST groups in action because he passed away suddenly in February of 1947.

The BST group was the immediate predecessor of the T-group (Benne, 1964). T-groups provided training in human relations, with T standing for training (Yalom, 1995). The premise underlying T-groups was based on Lewin’s finding that when participative methods are applied to small groups the members reported attitude changes, increased performance, and greater commitment to individual action (Coghlan & Jacobs, 2005). Additionally, T-groups offered a unique experiential component in which group members acted as both participants in, and observers of, the group process. This was accomplished through open-ended discussion in which group members offered feedback on one another’s behavior (Coghlan & Jacobs).

The practice of having a silent process observer and conducting conversations aimed at process analysis persisted in two fields. The method was used in the training group approach of the field of organizational development, as well as by psychologists in

the 1960s that held encounter groups (Yalom, 1995). Yalom considered the T-group and the encounter group to be ancestors of his interpersonal process approach to group psychotherapy (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). These roots are evident in the incorporation of a process observer, as well as end-of-group review discussions, into Yalom's model of interpersonal group therapy.

Interpersonal process research in group psychotherapy

Research on interpersonal process group therapy has often focused on the therapeutic factors of cohesion and feedback. Cohesion is considered to be the equivalent of the therapeutic alliance in individual counseling (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Research has demonstrated a connection between group cohesion and beneficial therapeutic outcomes (Bernard et al., 2008). Feedback also plays a central role in group therapy and in post-processing. Research on feedback in group psychotherapy suggests that specific feedback given to individual group members is related to clients' progress on therapeutic goals (Kivlighan, 1985; Rohde & Stockton, 1992). Morran, Stockton, Cline, and Teed (1998) describe several different group leader interventions for giving feedback and promoting feedback exchange among group members. Techniques such as instructing members on giving feedback, interrupting members who may be providing ineffective feedback, modifying a member's feedback to make it more effective, and connecting feedback to members' stated goals (Morran et al.) are useful here-and-now interventions. There are fewer examples in the literature of research on feedback from group leaders after group has ended (i.e., during post-processing).

There is a small body of literature on the process observer method of group psychotherapy and the techniques associated with process observation (i.e., process notes and end-of-meeting review). The literature provides support for the usefulness of process observation as part of training for new group leaders (Bieschke, Matthews, Wade, & Pricken, 1998; Hogan, Harris, & Cassidy, 2006). Process observers report that the experience helps them develop a better understanding of process and allows them to observe skilled group leaders (Bieschke et al.; Hogan et al.). Overall, process observers are not perceived to be intrusive or disruptive by group members (Bieschke et al.; Bloom & Dobie, 1969).

A qualitative study on the use of process notes concluded that the notes greatly enhanced the therapeutic process by providing questions for self-reflection, aiding members' integration of group process, and stimulating discussion (Falco & Bauman, 2004). The notes also provided structure and continuity between sessions by refreshing members' memories about what happened in the previous session. Group members stated that the notes helped them focus on salient issues and make connections from one session to the next (Falco & Bauman). Similarly, Hogan and colleagues (2006) showed that group members found process notes useful for remembering what occurred in previous sessions, illuminating process, and providing feedback (Hogan et al., 2006).

Most research on process observer methods in group psychotherapy is conducted with counseling or social work graduate students as group members (e.g., Cummings, 2001; Falco & Bauman, 2004). However, Hogan and colleagues (2006) investigated the impact of process observers and process notes on group psychotherapy clients in a

university counseling center. The aims of the study were to describe group members' perspectives on how process notes affect their experience of group psychotherapy. Additionally, clients' perceptions of different formats and modes of presentation of process notes were explored (Hogan et al.). The process observer methods described in this study included the use of written process notes but not a post-processing dialogue in the presence of group members.

A sample of 27 clients from four different interpersonal process therapy groups at a university counseling center participated in the study (Hogan et al., 2006). The authors created a 10-item self-report survey that consisted of five Likert-type questions meant to assess the therapeutic benefits of using process notes as they were described by Yalom in 1985. A multiple-choice item asked clients to select which method of presentation they preferred: (a) having a written copy of the process note available at the start of the next session; (b) having the notes read aloud at the start of the next session; (c) having a written note mailed to group members prior to the session; or (d) having notes read aloud at the end of the session. Finally, there were four open-ended questions asking respondents to name likes and dislikes about process notes and the presence of process observers in group. The therapy groups met 10 to 12 times during the semester, and surveys were administered at the second-to-last session, together with general evaluations that the agency routinely conducted at that time (Hogan et al.).

The findings concerning process notes are discussed presently, and then the results of the open-ended questions concerning the process observer are reviewed in greater detail. Ratings on the Likert-type items, with possible responses ranging from 1

(*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), were positive (Hogan et al., 2006). Seventy percent of the sample agreed moderately or strongly that the notes were helpful to their overall group experience. Forty-four percent agreed moderately or strongly that the notes “helped me better understand myself” (p. 25). Fifty-two percent agreed moderately or strongly that the notes helped them better understand how they interact with others, and 89% agreed moderately or strongly that the participation of the process observer was positive. Group members preferred, at a rate of 75%, the method of delivery of the process note that was utilized in their own group (Hogan et al.).

Three researchers independently coded and analyzed responses to the open-ended questions in order to generate categories and themes (Hogan et al., 2006). Seven categories were identified to summarize responses to the question, “What aspect(s) of the group process observer would you change/did not like?” The category *wanted more opinions from the process observer* contained statements such as, “I like how she started talking from her point of view towards the end of the sessions.” Another category, called *too challenging*, included statements such as, “Sometimes I thought people were ‘called out’ more so than was needed.” A third category, called *wanted more interaction/wanted observer to be able to talk/share*, contained the following sample statement: “No participation [leads to] no interaction [leads to] no intimacy [leads to] no developed trust.” Another client wrote, “She seemed to make a lot of judgments about our behavior that seemed to be very much a ‘snap judgment,’” which the researchers categorized under *process observer was wrong*. Another category accounted for statements suggesting that the clients did not understand the role of the process observer (*not understanding/wanting*

more instruction). A response from this category was, “Have maybe more of an introduction at the beginning of the semester about what it is and its objectives.” A category labeled *made it uncomfortable* contained statements such as, “People seemed somewhat unrelaxed.” Finally, there was a *nothing* category for responses like, “she was fine with me” (Hogan et al.).

Hogan et al. (2006) also asked students who had had a similar group experience in the past, but without a process observer, how strongly they agreed or disagreed that the group with the process observer was better. Five out of six students group members who had previous experience moderately or strongly agreed that the group with the process observer was better. Four out of the five students provided responses to an open-ended follow-up question that asked, *If you felt that the group was indeed better, how was it better?* Their responses were: (a) “seen in a more objective way, was a great summation of the group happenings,” (b) “events that took place that were not observed by others were brought to the attention of the group,” (c) “a few things made a lot of sense to me personally and affected the way I approached group that day. It was a lot nice (sic) to have the previous group reminded to me and helped me get in group gear,” and (d) “I felt like the process notes gave me more insight to how I interacted with the group.” (Hogan et al.).

The final item on the survey asked group members for any other thoughts or comments about the process observer experience. Six people wrote in responses: (a) “I liked her own observations/input,” (b) “Mine was very personal and positive,” (c) “It sucked; nothing against the observer,” (d) “Great! Good idea! Helps to point out things

otherwise unnoticed!” (e) “It made me regulate my comments and actions more because these things might be in the notes next week. It was like being graded every week. Although it helped be more aware of my actions, it made group less safe,” and (f) “Good job [smiley face drawn next to comment]” (Hogan et al., 2006).

The researchers concluded that group members found the use of process notes to be a beneficial component of their group therapy experience (Hogan et al., 2006). Regarding modality, they noted that clients did not seem to have a preference for how the process notes were delivered. They suggested that it might be worthwhile for the group leaders and members to decide amongst themselves which method is preferable. Finally, group members’ feedback concerning the process observer was mixed. Although the study did not ask for open-ended responses addressing what clients liked about having a process observer in their group, the responses concerning what they did not like revealed issues that deserve further attention.

There is only one other study that this author could find that examined group clients’ perceptions of end-of-meeting review discussions, or post-processing. Specifically, Leszcz, Yalom, and Norden (1985) interviewed 51 inpatient group psychotherapy participants about their reactions to the end-of-meeting review. The format that was used for the end-of-review meeting consisted of two 10-minute discussions, one among the group leaders and process observer(s), and one among the group members in response (Leszcz et al.). The findings indicated that the group members strongly agreed that the end-of-meeting review was an important component of the group experience (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

A study by Cox, Banez, Hawley, and Mostade (2003) examined a technique related to post-processing, called the reflecting team method (also referred to by some authors as the fishbowl method). The reflecting team is made up of professionals and trainees who observe a process group from another area in the room or from an adjacent room using a two-way mirror. At the end of the group session, the reflecting team discusses the processes they observed while the group listens. The group then reflects on what was said by the reflecting team. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the utility of reflecting teams as part of an experiential training activity for new group leaders. The participants found that the opportunity to hear a reflecting team commenting on their group process, then to respond to the reflecting team, then to debrief all together in a large group was helpful for gaining a deeper understanding of group process (Cox et al.). However, because the participants were graduate students who were interested in becoming group therapists, it is hard to generalize the findings to how actual group clients might feel about post-processing.

The review of the literature clarifies the need for further research on post-processing. Among the counseling centers across the U. S. that offer process-oriented therapy groups (32%; Colbs, 2003), it is unknown what proportion of agencies implements post-processing techniques. Furthermore, there may be a range of methods by which agencies conduct post-processing. Although a national survey documenting this information would be useful, it was assumed for purposes of the present study that very few counseling centers conduct post-processing discussions. Therefore, the present study focused on describing the phenomenon of post-processing as it is experienced by

group psychotherapy clients at one university counseling center. First, a thorough description of how post-processing is conducted at the agency is provided.

Post-processing at one university counseling center

This study took place at a university counseling center where a minimum of eight interpersonal process-oriented therapy groups are held each semester. Groups are run by a leadership team consisting of two to three co-therapists and one silent process observer. Each of the groups at the agency has a senior staff member as a speaking leader for both the fall and spring semesters. Group leaders-in-training from different disciplines begin as process observers and then may become speaking co-leaders. Psychology pre-doctoral interns with previous group experience may begin as speaking co-leaders, but psychiatry residents, social work interns, and rehabilitation counseling interns complete one semester as silent process observers and then become speaking co-leaders during the second semester. Doctoral-level psychology graduate students in practicum at the counseling center must process observe for two semesters and take the Group Psychotherapy class during the first semester of process observation.

Group psychotherapy sessions are 90 minutes in length. At the end of the session, group members are invited to stay and listen silently to a post-processing conversation among the leaders that lasts approximately 15 minutes. This conversation takes place among the group co-leaders and the process observer, in the presence of the group members. Group members and leaders remain seated in a circular configuration, with leaders interspersed among group members. Group members must remain silent.

Although some group members choose to leave before post-processing, most typically stay for post-processing.

The format differs from that of Yalom's end-of-meeting review in that there is not a segment devoted to group members' responses to the post-processing dialogue; rather, clients are asked to bring their comments back the following week and discuss them during the group session. Although the reasons for this decision are partly logistical (i.e., time constraints), the therapeutic rationale is that the time between sessions allows clients to think about the comments before responding, rather than reacting in the moment. Occasionally, clients do address the previous week's post-processing comments in session.

One of the groups at this agency used a slightly different format for post-processing. When group was ended, the members took responsibility for engaging in the post-process conversation with minimal input from the group leaders. In both variations on post-processing the dialogue focused on how group members related to one another, themes of the discussion, and observations about members' progress on their goals for group. The conversation may entail reflections about individuals or the group as a whole. The process is emergent and unstructured, allowing room for a wide range of comments or ideas to be expressed.

Given the limited body of literature on post-processing, a qualitative study describing the technique in depth will provide a useful foundation for further research. The conceptual and theoretical foundations of post-processing have been described, but the experience of post-processing from the perspective of group members is not fully

articulated in the existing literature. The present study was a qualitative examination of how group psychotherapy members experience post-processing.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research refers to a group of scientific methods that allow investigators to describe experiences as they occur in their corresponding contexts. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” (p. 3). Qualitative research is often used to give a better understanding of complex social phenomena by studying the lived experiences of individuals, examining society and culture, or analyzing language and communication (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Qualitative studies add to the literature by contributing to theories, having significance in applied settings, or generating change within a sociocultural context (Marshall & Rossman). For example, qualitative research is often the preferred form of inquiry for new areas of research in which there is little existing literature.

Although qualitative research is gaining favor among scientists, it is still useful to discuss it relative to quantitative designs and methods with which researchers tend to be most familiar. Both types of research are used to study the perspective of individuals, although qualitative and quantitative methods differ in several key ways. Quantitative researchers use empirical methods to infer information about a construct while qualitative researchers usually rely on interviews and observation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Accordingly, the unit of data in quantitative research is numbers, whereas in qualitative

research it is words. Although quantitative methods may be more objective, the findings reflect an estimate of the individual experience that minimizes or removes sociocultural context in order to draw generalizable conclusions. Qualitative researchers prioritize authenticity in describing and reporting findings as experienced by individuals within a social and cultural context, and thus the findings may not be generalizable (Ponterotto, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln stated that rich description is another feature that distinguishes qualitative from quantitative research. Qualitative research is presented using detailed descriptions that incorporate the language of the individuals studied, whereas quantitative research usually addresses the commonalities across many individuals using an objective and detached style (Ponterotto).

The present study was well-suited for qualitative research because the researcher's goal was to describe and better understand a social phenomenon: post-processing in group psychotherapy. Very little has been written about post-processing in the scientific literature; therefore, it is useful to better explain what it is and how it is experienced by clients. This objective was more fully accomplished through interviews and rich descriptions of individual accounts than by objective, quantitative measures.

Paradigmatic framework

Within the realm of qualitative research there are several different approaches. These approaches have been organized according to various paradigmatic frameworks. Ponterotto (2005) suggested that qualitative research approaches could be described according to the five conceptual parameters used in philosophy of science: (a) ontology, which refers to the nature of reality; (b) epistemology, the study of how learning occurs

with regard to the relationship between learner and subject; (c) axiology, the role of values in science; (d) rhetorical structure, which refers to the means by which scientific findings are presented; and (e) methodology, or how the science is carried out (Ponterotto).

Burrell and Morgan (1979) provided a framework for organizing paradigmatic approaches to qualitative inquiry by locating them along two continua, depending on the researcher's intentions. The first continuum is subjectivity-objectivity. Researchers on the objective end of the continuum would be concerned with examining topics from an outside perspective and would aim to summarize the findings for purposes of generalizing beyond the sample. Researchers on the subjective end of the continuum would be concerned with individual perspectives and would value each person's different experiences as equally valid and true (Burrell & Morgan).

The second continuum, regulation-change, accounts for the extent to which the researcher is interested in either maintaining the status quo (regulation) or creating change (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Research situated on the regulation end of this continuum would include descriptive studies that rely on nomothetic interpretations and do not aim to alter or change the phenomenon being investigated. Research on the change end of the continuum would be dedicated to raising consciousness or otherwise stimulating change among the participants of the study (Burrell & Morgan).

The intersection of these two continua yield four broad paradigms: (a) radical humanism, characterized by subjectivity and change; (b) radical structuralism, which values objectivity and change; (c) functionalism, which is focused on objectivity and

regulation; and (d) interpretivism, which falls on the subjective and regulation ends of the continua (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The present study is situated in the interpretive paradigm. Interpretivism assumes that reality is constructed by individuals, and multiple realities exist rather than a single universal Truth (subjectivity; Burrell & Morgan). Although change or consciousness-raising may inadvertently occur as a result of the research process, interpretive researchers do not plan for change as a primary aim of their work. Instead, the objective is to capture people's lived experiences and to create an authentic textural description of their experiences and the associated meanings (regulation; Burrell & Morgan; Creswell, 2007).

The interpretive paradigm is most consistent with the aims of the present study. Specifically, the researcher was interested in understanding the experience of post-processing from the perspective of group psychotherapy members. It was assumed that different individuals would have different experiences of post-processing and that each person's subjective perspective is equally valid and true. This situates the present research on the subjective end of the subjectivity-objectivity continuum. An additional objective of this study was to capture the experiences of the participants without interfering in the process or changing the phenomenon under investigation. Although this research may be the first step in developing further studies that may investigate change, the present study is concerned simply with describing the phenomenon of post-processing as it occurs in a particular setting. Therefore, the study is located on the regulation, or status quo, end of the regulation-change continuum.

Phenomenological approach

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research was chosen for the present study for two main reasons. First, phenomenology is a commonly used approach within the interpretive paradigm and its philosophical assumptions are consistent with those of interpretivism. Second, phenomenology is suited to research questions that examine individuals' experiences of a shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The present research was an examination of individual group members' experiences of post-processing, a phenomenon that is shared by members of the same therapy group.

The term *phenomenology* was first used in philosophy to refer to knowledge that is based on one's immediate experience with a subject (Moustakas, 1994). Eighteenth-century philosophers Hegel, Kant, and Descartes emphasized the importance of first-hand senses, perceptions, and awareness for defining the meaning of a phenomenon. In other words, the true nature of a thing is determined and made meaningful by the individual who perceives it (Moustakas). Based on this philosophical premise, two main branches of phenomenology are described in the literature: descriptive and interpretive approaches.

Descriptive phenomenology was first articulated by twentieth-century philosopher Edmund Husserl, who emphasized that, "knowledge based on intuition and essence precedes empirical knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Husserl referred to his qualitative approach to scientific inquiry as *transcendental phenomenology*. In this approach, the researcher's assumptions are set aside and, "phenomena are revisited freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego" (Moustakas, p. 33). The researcher also searches for commonalities in participants'

experiences of the phenomenon in order to arrive at a generalized description (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

Interpretive, or hermeneutic, phenomenology stems from the work of Martin Heidegger. His philosophy was built on that of Husserl and also incorporated existential elements (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Heidegger believed that in addition to describing the subjective experiences of individuals, the researcher should attempt to uncover the meanings of the lived experiences. He also emphasized that the social, cultural, and political environment in which a person resides must be taken into account in order to understand their experience of a phenomenon. Researchers using an interpretive approach would ask participants what they know about the phenomenon, how they experience it cognitively, emotionally, and physically, and also how their experience then influences their behavior (Lopez & Willis).

A key difference between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology is the role of the researcher. In descriptive phenomenology, the researcher attempts to set aside biases by learning little about the subject prior to conducting the study, by foregoing an orienting framework or articulation of hypotheses, and by *bracketing* his or her assumptions and beliefs about the phenomenon throughout the research process (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Bracketing may entail keeping a journal and designating one or more consultants to monitor and make transparent possible influences of the researcher on the findings. Heidegger believed that it was not possible to separate the researcher's knowledge and experiences, which was consistent with his philosophy that context is inextricably linked to knowledge and understanding (Lopez & Willis). In interpretive

phenomenology the researcher's expertise is considered a valuable resource because it may provide direction and focus to the inquiry and ensure that the research endeavor will constitute a valuable contribution to the literature. Hypotheses and findings should also be discussed in regard to a theoretical framework. Nevertheless, the preconceptions of the researcher should be clarified and articulated (Lopez & Willis).

Many qualitative research studies that employ a phenomenological approach do not specify whether their methods are descriptive or interpretive, nor do they seem to adhere strictly to one or the other. Creswell (2007) provided a basic overview of the assumptions and methods of five different qualitative approaches: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. He identified the defining features of phenomenology as follows: (a) the guiding philosophical task is "a search for wisdom" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58); (b) all presuppositions and judgments are to be suspended; (c) the reality of an object, or concept, is "inextricably related to one's consciousness of it" (p. 59); and (d) reality "is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual" (p. 59). While the setting aside of preconceptions is consistent with Husserl's values, the next two points concerning the philosophical assumptions about reality and the experiences of the participants seem more consistent with the interpretive approach.

The phenomenological approach used in the present study is based philosophically in interpretive phenomenology. Rather than attempting to suspend or eliminate the researcher's influence on the study, it is assumed to be impossible to conduct value-free research. Instead, the researcher took steps to minimize bias by

monitoring her own beliefs and disclosing them with the presentation of the findings from the study. The interpretive approach was chosen for this study for several reasons. First, it was consistent with the researcher's own belief that individuals' understanding and experiences of phenomena are inevitably connected to their social and cultural context. Second, this belief is compatible with Yalom's interpersonal process approach to group psychotherapy, in which human behavior is viewed as a social phenomenon and existential issues are also addressed (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Third, the researcher utilized Yalom's theory as an orienting framework, and also drew on previous literature to establish the value and contributions of the study. The literature and the conceptual framework are also utilized in the presentation of the research findings in order to facilitate a discussion of the possible meanings and implications of the findings.

The overall research question for this study is: How do group psychotherapy clients experience post-processing? This question is explored in a manner consistent with interpretive phenomenology. Accordingly, there are no hypotheses about the findings. In order to capture each participant's individual experience, two guiding questions were asked:

1. How would you describe your experience of post-processing?
2. What has influenced or affected your experience of post-processing?

Significance of study

This study was the first to examine the experience of post-processing among group psychotherapy clients at a university counseling center. Although the benefits of process observation and post-process discussions for the purpose of training new group

leaders are fairly evident, the benefits for group members are less clear. Perhaps clients will describe post-processing as helpful for process-illumination and feedback, as found by Hogan and colleagues (2006) concerning process notes (see Hogan et al., 2006). Clients may also experience benefits from post-processing that are not possible with process notes. For example, post-processing may provide effective modeling of interpersonal interactions (e.g., conflict, feedback) by group leaders, or closure as a result of hearing a synthesis of the events of the session. On the other hand, group members may feel self-conscious or criticized as a result of the comments made about them in post-processing. Moreover, although the post-processing technique is meant to make therapy seem more transparent and collaborative (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), some clients may feel disempowered by listening to someone talk about them without being able to respond.

This study constitutes the first step toward finding the answers to these questions by describing the phenomenon of post-processing as it is experienced by psychotherapy group members. Providing a detailed and in-depth description of the phenomenon of post-processing will help clinicians understand how this technique may be useful in their group therapeutic work, and will provide the basis for further research on the technique of post-processing.

Chapter 3

Method

Design

The design of the study is qualitative research set in the interpretive paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Procedures reflected the philosophical ideals of phenomenology, which sets out to understand and describe the essence of participants' experiences of the phenomenon. The methodological approach was consistent with interpretive phenomenology, and followed procedures that reflect Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology, and practices described by Creswell (2007). Data collection consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. The data-analytic strategy consisted of an iterative process in which categories were inferred using procedures described by Moustakas and by Smith and Osborn (2003). Institutional Review Board approval was obtained.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the rigor, scholarship, and credibility of the design and methods. It is sometimes considered analogous to quantitative indices of reliability and validity. There is no "gold standard" for how to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Instead, steps taken by the researcher to increase trustworthiness and rigor are guided by the paradigmatic framework and assumptions of the study (Morrow, 2005; Padgett, 1998). Several strategies were used in the present study. Each one is consistent with the interpretive paradigm, which aims to capture the subjective experiences of the participants while

refraining from initiating change within the bounded context where the phenomenon occurs. These strategies included the use of two journals (reflexive and methodological), two external auditors, and member checking. Each of these is described presently.

In phenomenological research, the researcher herself is an instrument in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The stimulus value of the researcher is present in the interpersonal dynamics of the interviews, and the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and experiences are inevitably connected to the data analysis and interpretation. The presence of the researcher within the study is acknowledged and explicitly articulated through the use of a reflexive journal. The reflexive journal was used to record the researcher's personal thoughts and feelings concerning all things pertaining to the study.

The first entry contained a full description of the researcher's own experiences with the phenomenon, as is recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2006). The following excerpt is from the first entry:

I was intrigued with post-processing from the first time that I learned about it when I took the group therapy class. It seemed so weird to me that we would talk about the group members in front of them, yet they would not be able to respond. It almost seemed like an abuse of power, given that there is already an inherent power differential between the therapists and the clients. I kept thinking, "Who are *we* to talk about them?" Somehow I felt that by engaging in post-processing I might be communicating a message of "I am better than you." Although this concern is probably a bit extreme, it is probably realistic to say that *some* type of message is being conveyed. More likely, that message is, "I know something

about interpersonal processes and about psychotherapy, and with that knowledge I can help to comment on the group and the group members.”

The researcher also used the reflexive journal to record *field notes*, reflections about research activities that were made at the time the activities were carried out (e.g., directly after an interview). These entries captured the researcher’s ideas and developing impressions throughout the course of the study. Here is an entry made after one of the interviews:

One thing that was interesting is that she said at the end of the interview that she was worried that I was disappointed because she did have lots of positive things to say about post-processing. She kind of reasoned herself out of that worry by thinking aloud, saying that she supposed that the research was valuable whether the conclusion was to keep post-processing or not. I reiterated that her responses were very helpful and that my objective was simply to describe the phenomenon, so I am interested in capturing all aspects of it, whether they are positive or negative. She seemed reassured by this. It does make me wonder, however, if I somehow projected a meta-message that I wanted to hear positive things. I will have to review for this when I code and write, and also talk about it with my outside auditor.

The reflexive journal was used to assist in *bracketing*, or clarifying and articulating the researcher’s preconceptions and influences on the data. This was important in understanding any bias that may be intrinsic to the researcher and helping to

set it aside, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the results (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

In addition to articulating the role of the researcher as instrument, it is important to document precisely how the study was conducted. This was done through the use of a methodological journal. The methodological journal was a written document that described the research process step by step. Decisions concerning methodology were recorded here, as well as a log of all contacts with participants throughout recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The methodological journal contained detailed notes tracking the progress of the study and data analysis procedures.

Two auditors were utilized in this study. Both were familiar with qualitative research and phenomenological methods and were available throughout the study for debriefing and consultation. The first auditor, the researcher's academic advisor, focused specifically on the researcher's reflexivity. She engaged in dialogue with the researcher aimed at elucidating any beliefs or assumptions that might inadvertently influence the data collection, analysis, and report of the findings. The second auditor, a colleague of the researcher, was a consultant throughout the data analysis process. This auditor provided feedback to the researcher as themes and categories were developed. The use of auditors is considered a valuable strategy for increasing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Padgett, 1998).

Finally, input and feedback from participants was sought regarding the accuracy of the categories and descriptions made by the researcher. This technique, known as *member checking*, improves the trustworthiness of the findings by ensuring that the

researcher has correctly represented the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Padgett, 1998). Member checking methods are described later in this chapter.

Recruitment

Recruitment procedures were designed with consideration for the participants' ability to feel safe continuing to receive counseling services as the first priority. To ensure that this would be the case, the researcher collaborated with the Director of the counseling center and with the group therapy co-leaders. Group leadership teams at the agency attend one of two 90-minute weekly group supervision meetings. The researcher attended both of these supervision meetings one week for 15 minutes in order to explain the study and talk with group leaders about attending one of their group sessions in order to recruit participants. All of the group leaders agreed to allow the researcher to come to the groups, pending permission from the group participants.

The researcher utilized purposeful sampling to recruit individuals who varied by demographic characteristics and who belonged to groups led by different therapists at the counseling center. To that end, members of all the groups were recruited in order to generate a diverse pool of potential participants. A competing concern for recruitment was the need to secure enough participants to reach *saturation*. Saturation is achieved when no new information emerges from subsequent interviews (Creswell, 2007). Most phenomenological studies that utilize individual interviews seek an enrollment of 5 to 25 participants (Creswell). It was expected that 10 to 12 participants would be needed for the present study given the finite scope of the phenomenon of interest.

Inclusion criteria for the study were that participants had experienced at least three post-processing sessions at the time of recruitment. The content and process of group therapy, and likewise that of post-processing, may vary substantially from week to week. Therefore, the inclusion requirement ensured that participants had multiple experiences with the phenomenon of interest in order to inform their individual experience.

During a 2-week period, the researcher attended each of the groups held at the agency. The leaders were asked to tell the group members the researcher's first and last name so that if anyone in the group recognized the researcher, and did not feel comfortable having the researcher learn of his or her participation in group therapy, they would have the opportunity to decline having the researcher enter. The researcher was permitted to enter all of the groups. In most instances, the group leaders asked their members at the outset of the group if it would be okay for a graduate student to come in for a few minutes at the beginning of the group session in order to tell them about a study. The researcher waited in the hall until one of the group leaders came out and signaled the researcher to enter the room. In two of the groups, the leaders asked at the beginning of the group session if the researcher could enter at the end, just prior to the start of post-processing. The decision to enter at the beginning or the end of the session was determined by the group leaders based on what they thought would be least intrusive for their groups.

Upon entering the group, the researcher introduced herself and gave a 1 to 2 minute overview of the study. The researcher emphasized that the participants' choice to

be in the study would have no bearing on their counseling services, and that information provided in interviews would not be made available to group leaders. This message was in keeping with the goal of maintaining the trust and safety the group members to feel free to continue receiving services. The researcher distributed a recruitment form to all group members (see Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Form). Interested participants were asked to indicate 'yes' on the form and provide either a phone number or e-mail address where the researcher could contact them with more information about the study. All recruitment slips were collected promptly by the researcher.

A total of 39 participants responded affirmatively to the recruitment forms. Of these, 34 indicated e-mail as their preferred mode of being contacted. The following e-mail was sent within 1 to 7 days after attending each of the groups:

Dear _____,

I am writing to follow-up about the possibility of interviewing you for my research on post-processing in group therapy. I am excited about learning what post-processing is like for you as a group member. Participation in the study would entail the following:

- We would set up a 10-minute time to meet and review the purpose of the research. I would explain the consent form and have you sign it, if you agree.
- We would do an individual interview. We would have up to 90 minutes to talk, but it may not take that long. This interview could be done at the

same time as our consent meeting, or another time that is convenient for you.

Our meetings will be held at [the counseling center] and everything you say will be kept confidential. I have the following blocks of time available during the next few weeks. Are you able to meet me during any of these times (we would block out 2 hours if you want to do the consent and interview together, or we would need only 10 minutes if you want to do the consent first)?

Telephone calls were made to those people who indicated that they preferred to be contacted by phone. Interested participants were then scheduled for individual meetings to discuss the study further and secure informed consent (see Appendix B: Research Subject Information and Consent Form). The consent meetings and interviews were held at the counseling center for several reasons. Specifically, to provide continuity for the participants, to demonstrate that the agency was supportive of the study, to ensure confidentiality, and to help participants feel comfortable in an environment that was familiar to them. Participants were willing to take part in the study without compensation or incentives.

All of the participants chose to schedule their consent meetings and interviews in a single time block. After the first three interviews, it became apparent that time required for informed consent and completion of the interview was approximately 1 to 1½ hours. The recruitment email was edited to reflect this, and the scheduling of participants was adjusted accordingly.

The first nine interviews were conducted during an initial data collection period lasting 1 month. Throughout this time, regular review of the interview data was conducted to gauge the extent to which new information continued to emerge. The researcher consulted with the auditors for the study and determined that saturation would likely be reached shortly given the dwindling amount of new information that was provided with each subsequent interview. It was determined that three more interviews would be conducted and saturation would be re-evaluated.

The researcher was able to secure enrollment of one more participant from the initial recruitment pool. A second round of recruiting was conducted in order to enroll additional participants. After a total of 12 interviews were completed, saturation was reassessed. It was decided that additional interviews would not likely yield new information above and beyond what was already provided by the 12 participants. Recruitment was closed, with all the interviews having been completed within a 3-month time frame.

Data collection

Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to participating in the study. Consent forms were kept in a secure, locked filing cabinet. Data collection consisted of in-depth individual interviews conducted by the researcher. In order to enhance trustworthiness, the interviews took place in the formal setting of the counseling center.

Before each interview participants were reminded that the content discussed would be kept confidential. Next, basic demographic and background information was

collected by the interviewer. Demographic questions included: (a) age; (b) gender; (c) race/ethnicity; (d) year in college; and (e) college major. Background questions included: (a) number of group sessions attended; (b) number of post-processing sessions attended; (c) prior experience with group therapy; and (d) brief summary of problem or issue for which the participant sought counseling services. Most participants did not know the number of group sessions or post-processing sessions they had attended. The researcher later obtained this information from the counseling center, as specified in the consent form. Participants indicated whether they attended all or most post-processing sessions.

The main section of the interview was aimed at gathering a detailed description of how group psychotherapy clients experience post-processing. An interview guide (see Appendix C) was created based on two guiding questions from Moustakas' (1994) approach to interpretive phenomenology. Moustakas (1994) explained the importance of capturing the lived experiences of the phenomenon by ascertaining a textural description and a structural description. The textural description includes information about what the experience of post-processing is like for group members. The guiding question for the textural description of post-processing was *How would you describe your experience of post-processing?* The structural description includes information about the way the experience of post-processing is influenced or affected. It is meant to capture the context in which the phenomenon is experienced. The guiding question for the structural description of post-processing was *What has influenced or affected your experience of post-processing?* Several prompts were created as follow up questions to the two guiding

questions. The prompts were meant to generate thorough descriptions by offering several different angles from which the experience of post-processing might be discussed.

The first interview question (“How would you describe your experience of post-processing?”) had prompts about participants’ thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and physical experiences related to post-processing. These were: (a) “What are your thoughts related to post-processing?” (b) “What are your feelings related to post-processing?” (c) “How does post-processing affect your behavior?” and (d) “Any physical reactions or sensations associated with post-processing?” The second interview question (“What influences or affects the way you experience post-processing?”) included a prompt that was meant to clarify the question in case of confusion. This prompt was: “Sometimes people experience post-processing differently from week to week. If this is true for you, any ideas about what might influence the experience?” Follow-up questions asked how the experience of post-processing changed over time, and how it was affected by the process observer.

Two additional questions were included in the interviews. The first was: “How has your experience in post-processing affected [your progress on] what you are working on in group?” This question was not considered central to the primary research objective of understanding the experience of post-processing. However, it was included in order to gather information relevant to potential follow-up studies regarding post-processing and its therapeutic role. Finally, the last question was a broad, open-ended question meant to provide space for any other comments the participants might have. This question was: “Is there anything else that comes to mind, that we might not have talked about?” In an

effort to avoid demand characteristics and to increase the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher emphasized that any information would be valuable and there were no “right” answers. Similarly, the researcher was careful to use open-ended questioning in order to avoid “leading” the participant.

In order to prepare for data collection, the researcher practiced providing informed consent and conducting an interview with one of the auditors for the study. As a result, slight modifications were made to the interview guide, which resulted in the final version that was used in data collection. The interview guide served as a basis for how the interviews were conducted, but the emergent nature of phenomenological interviewing allowed the researcher to follow participants’ leads regarding the information they shared. Natural deviations from the interview guide occurred as participants described their experiences and relevant follow-up questions became part of the dialogue. Additional questions were then incorporated into subsequent interviews as patterns developed. For example, after two participants spontaneously described avoiding eye contact during post-processing, the researcher began asking about this in later interviews. All changes to the interview guide were documented in the researcher’s methodological journal. Corresponding reactions or impressions on the part of the researcher were written in the reflexive journal.

Interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder. Digitally recorded files were saved electronically under code numbers assigned to each participant. The audio files were backed up on CD and later transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Transcripts were saved in Microsoft Word and labeled using participants’ code numbers.

Transcript files were also backed up on CD. Pseudonyms were later assigned to each of the participants.

Data analysis

Summary statistics (means and standard deviations) for the age and number sessions attended were computed using Excel and reported in the results section. A table of descriptive information contains each participant's pseudonym, gender, age, race/ethnicity, and number of sessions attended. Background information on each participant (year in college, major or program of study, and goals for group counseling) is included in a brief narrative summary of each person in the results section. Background information was modified to protect confidentiality and did not have any bearing on the interpretation of data or presentation of results.

Qualitative data analysis was an iterative process guided by the suggestions of Moustakas (1994), Smith and Osborn (2003), and Creswell (2007). Initial analysis consisted of reviewing each transcript individually. After reading the transcript at least once, the researcher went back and made hand-written notes in the margins of the transcript (Smith & Osborn). These notes summarized what the participant seemed to be saying, noted evidence of emerging themes, and highlighted salient quotes. An example of marginal notes made for one interview is shown in Figure 1.

Marginal notes were made for all 12 interviews. Toward the end of the process of marginal note-taking the researcher started a preliminary list of categories (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This list was modified and items were added as the marginal note-taking

continued. Next, the researcher typed the marginal notes for the first three participants. The researcher printed hard copies of the typed marginal notes and the preliminary list of categories. These documents were examined and the list of categories was modified further. Related ideas or comments that seemed to capture the same sentiment were listed together in clusters. Small groups of overlapping clusters were collapsed into single categories. When this process seemed to yield no more clarity, the researcher moved to the next step.

Each of the 12 interviews was printed on a different colored piece of paper. For each transcript, the researcher identified segments that conveyed a different idea and manually parsed these statements by cutting them out with scissors. This step was consistent with the procedure that Moustakas (1994) called *horizontalizing*. In horizontalizing, the researcher parses the transcript into statements, each of which are considered to have equal value. Next, the clippings were clustered together based on similar meaning and labeled with sticky notes. Moustakas' referred to this as creating *meaning units* from the horizontalized statements. Some of the meaning units, or clusters, were consistent those that had been identified on the preliminary list of clusters and categories. Also, new clusters emerged.

The clipping (horizontalizing) and clustering process was the most time-intensive stage of the data analysis. It involved several waves of working with the clippings by sorting and organizing them into clusters, alternating with updating and adjusting the electronic list of categories. There were several iterations of clusters being collapsed into categories, and then breaking down categories and re-clustering in order to collapse them

again into slightly different sets of categories. The researcher's reflections on this stage of analysis are captured in the following reflexive journal entry:

I feel like Winnie The Pooh chasing heffalumps. He follows a set of tracks around the forest only to keep ending up in the place where he started. It turns out there are no heffalumps, he is chasing his own footprints and going in circles. It is very reinforcing because each time he gets back to the beginning he sees more footprints and thinks he must be getting closer to catching up with the heffalump. I had a slide in my dissertation proposal that depicted three interlocking wheels and I used this image to explain the iterative process of qualitative data analysis. This image keeps coming into my mind because each time I go back and forth between my quotes and my electronic list I picture the wheels making one revolution. I have decided that each revolution is important as long it yields some incremental value beyond what I had before. I think I will know when to stop this process because I will go around in a full circle and no new information will emerge. Hopefully I won't get too dizzy in the process!

The next stage of analysis consisted of writing descriptions of the categories and reviewing these with the external auditor. The auditor reviewed the interview transcripts and compared her impressions of the salient themes with the categories that were defined by the researcher. Revisions and adjustments to the categories were made as the researcher engaged in the iterative process of data analysis in consultation with the auditor. Once it was agreed that the categories seemed to accurately reflect the data, and represent distinct aspects of the experience of post-processing, the names and

descriptions of the categories were described in greater detail and representative quotes were selected. This process was done first for the set of categories that represented the textural experience of post-processing, then for the set of categories that represented the structural descriptions.

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the results, the researcher engaged in a verification process with the second auditor. The auditor was provided with the list of categories and a separate list of several quotes chosen at random. She coded the quotes by indicating in which category she believed each one fit. The auditor's coding was highly consistent with the way the researcher had coded each quote. Quotes that did not clearly fit in any of the categories were set aside. Later, the researcher looked for "negative cases." Specifically, comments that reflected an experience that was contradictory to the category were sought out and included in the researcher's descriptions. This strategy was recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) in order to guard against the natural tendency among people to seek patterns and fail to acknowledge contradictory information.

Next, the researcher proceeded with member checking. An e-mail was sent to each of the participants with an attachment containing the category descriptions and representative quotes. Participants were asked to review the material and provide opinions about whether it seemed to capture their experience of post-processing. Two participants could not be reached because the e-mail addresses they provided at the time of recruitment were no longer activated. Among the 10 participants who were contacted, three responded. The first wrote the following:

I'm glad you found the interviews so helpful; it seems like you've summarized the feelings about post-processing really well. I particularly love the term "emotional homework" because I think it describes the process so well, and the final chapter metaphor is incredibly accurate, especially because of the range of responses that group members can have. Overall, I really don't have any additional comments or changes, because you've done such a great job!

The second participant provided the following reply, along with the attached description of the categories I had sent including several comments she made using the Microsoft Word 'New Comment' tool.

Thank you for sharing the post-processing themes you found with me. It's great that 12 people participated, and it looks like you were able to get a pretty good picture of the post-processing experience! I don't remember exactly what I said during my interview, but there weren't any themes you mentioned that I couldn't relate in some way to my experiences of group.

I've attached your document with my comments included. Hope it's helpful!

Most of the comments expressed agreement with the content or accuracy of the experiences described (e.g., "Great theme title!" and "Definitely!"). Other comments included ideas or suggestions. For example, the participant suggested that one of the themes within a category might be able to stand alone as a separate category. In fact, the researcher considered this and agreed, but decided that the criteria for making this particular theme into a category would require similar consideration for other themes and

that the result could be an unmanageable number of categories. Therefore no change was made. Another comment asked for clarification about the context of one of the sample quotes provided. No suggestions or changes were implied in this comment. Finally, the participant wrote a brief message to the researcher containing additional thoughts and comments, and asking whether the final document would be made available to participants. The researcher replied with a response to each of the participant's comments and questions. Additional feedback was also requested from the participant regarding certain points. To date, the researcher has not corresponded further with the participant.

The third response was:

Sorry it took me so long to get back to you on these themes. I thought the themes were a good "sum-up" of the different ways post-processing was useful in group.

I really identified with the connections and commonalities portion and the silent observer phenomenon. Even though it was weird to be talked about, I felt like the post-processing was a very helpful experience. I'm very thankful for my time in group and I think post-processing was a very useful part of my time there. I hope your research goes well!

No substantive changes were made to the categorization scheme as a result of member checking. The positive responses were considered evidence that the categories were accurate and represented the essence of the experiences of at least three members of the sample. In the following section, the results of the study are presented in detail.

Chapter 4

Results

The results are presented in three sections. First, descriptive statistics about the sample of participants are provided. Second, profiles of each participant are presented. These include demographic information about the individual and an overview of how he or she described the experience of post-processing. Selected quotes were provided in some profiles to illustrate unique qualities, ideas, or perspectives. Third, the categories that resulted from data analysis are described, along with representative quotes.

Description of sample

Participants were 12 individuals who had attended one of several outpatient psychotherapy groups offered at a university counseling center. Three were males and nine were females. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 37 years old, with the average age being 24.83 ($SD = 5.89$). The majority of the sample (10 participants) identified their race or ethnicity to be White/Caucasian. One participant self-identified as African American, and one self-identified as biracial (part Caucasian and part Native American). Half the participants were undergraduate students pursuing their first Bachelor's degree. Four participants were in Master's programs, one was a doctoral student, and one was working on a second Bachelor's degree.

Five different psychotherapy groups were represented by the sample. Ten of the participants experienced post-processing conducted as a conversation among group leaders while the members remained silent. These 10 participants were members of one of four different groups offered at the counseling center. The other two participants from

the total sample of 12 belonged to a fifth group. These participants (Kathy¹ and Jack) experienced a variation of post-processing in which the members led the conversation with minimal input from the group leaders. The implications of having two different post-processing methods represented in the sample are discussed throughout this section as relevant and in more detail in the next chapter.

The number of group sessions attended by participants ranged from 4 to 90 ($M = 25.42$, $SD = 25.52$). The vast majority of them said they attended all the post-processing sessions. Two of the participants who had been in group counseling for several semesters stated that they each had a semester in which they were unable to attend post-processing due to scheduling conflicts immediately after group. All participants had attended post-processing the semester that they participated in this study. Table 1 provides a summary of the descriptive information about the sample.

Participant profiles

In order to protect the confidentiality of participants, the researcher created pseudonyms. The females were Vera, Rebecca, Kathy, Joy, Claudia, Teresa, Leticia, Susan, and Pam. The three male participants were called Jae, Dave, and Jack. Additionally, identifying information was omitted from descriptions and quotes, or changed, in order to disguise the participant without altering the meaning of the quotes. A profile of each participant is provided. Potentially identifying descriptive information was changed to further disguise the participants (e.g., year in school, major, and presenting concerns).

¹ Pseudonyms were selected for each the participants in order to protect confidentiality.

Jae. Jae is a 20-year-old, Caucasian male in his junior year, majoring in finance. His goals for group counseling were to reduce social anxiety and explore sexual orientation issues. Jae attended a total of 12 sessions. One salient idea that Jae shared about his experience of post-processing was that he found it important for leaders to “call out” the group or individual members when it seemed that they were not working effectively toward their goals for therapy. For Jae, this sense of being held accountable for making therapeutic gains prompted him to participate more in subsequent sessions. Another salient experience for Jae was feeling vulnerable and exposed when leaders talked about him during post-processing. He said that there were times when he had a bad week and didn’t want to be active in group, and then hearing the leaders discuss his lack of participation during post-processing compounded his bad week and left him feeling worse. At the same time, he said he highly valued the leaders’ opinions because of their training and expertise.

Vera. Vera is a 25-year-old Caucasian female in her last semester of graduate school for a master’s degree in public health. Her goals for counseling were to explore relationship issues and depression. She attended a total of 22 sessions. Vera experienced post-processing as a time of transition. She said it allowed her to calm down, gain closure, and prepare to leave group. Vera also described having new insights about herself during post-processing, as well as realizing connections among group members. She noted that she had been in groups at the counseling center with different co-leaders, and that her experience of post-processing was different depending on who was co-

leading. Vera also explained that over time she was able to recognize group processes and themes on her own, and as a result she had become bored with post-processing.

Rebecca. Rebecca is a 19-year-old Caucasian female in her sophomore year, double-majoring in psychology and criminal justice. She attended 20 group sessions. Her goals for group counseling were centered on family-of-origin relationships and management of her anger and stress. Rebecca described very positive thoughts and feelings related to post-processing. Prominent within her responses were feelings of closure, calming down, and reflection during post-processing. She described the role of post-processing as a time of transition and preparation to leave group. She shared several examples throughout the interview in order to illustrate her experiences. Several of her responses conveyed the additive value of feeling connected with other members as a result of post-processing. Rebecca also reported an increased awareness of her own interpersonal patterns and ability to recognize group process as it unfolded, which she attributed to the experience of post-processing. In our interview, Rebecca demonstrated a strong grasp of understanding process versus content. Specifically, she articulated her experiences by explaining what happened and also relating that to how she experienced it and how it affected the dynamics of the group.

Dave. Dave is an 18-year-old, Caucasian male in his freshman year, majoring in English. His goals for counseling were to decrease depressive symptoms and social anxiety, and decrease marijuana use. Dave attended 11 group sessions. A prominent theme throughout Dave's interview was his skepticism about how genuine and honest the leaders really were during post-processing. The following quote illustrates this:

I'm just trying to analyze their [sic] counselors' perspective. And it's more them saying supportive, encouraging things that I think don't always – [interlude] – representative [sic] of how they feel, or at least maybe that's my suspicion.

Dave also described experiencing new insights as a result of post-processing, and developing “more of an ear” for process comments over time. Regarding being in the role of a silent observer he said he sometimes felt embarrassed or uncomfortable. As a result, he said he avoided eye contact with anyone in group and tried to “step back” from his emotions.

Kathy. Kathy is a 21-year-old, African American female in her senior year, majoring in women's studies. She sought counseling to work on anxiety, and at the time of our interview she had attended 39 group therapy sessions. Kathy was in the group in which the members conducted the post-processing. She explained that she had been in group for two semesters; the leaders conducted post-processing the first semester, and the members took over early in the second semester. She was the only participant in the study who had substantial experience with both variations of post-processing. Kathy was clear in stating early in the interview that she preferred having the leaders conduct post-processing.

I preferred the one where the group leaders did it because I think I valued their opinion more than I did the members, and it was nice to not have to talk. I got to hear what they were saying for the whole session. And I definitely didn't like the one where we had to do it. Not at all.

Kathy shared her thoughts and feelings about how she experienced both types of post-processing, but was more talkative when describing the version in which the leaders led the post-processing discussion. Kathy valued comments from the leaders about progress or improvement, especially when she made an effort to participate and then that was recognized by the leaders during post-processing. Overall, she said she often felt anxious during post-processing, and she managed her anxiety by putting her head down and staring at the floor. She suggested that she gained more from post-processing the longer she was in group because she became more comfortable and able to listen.

Joy. Joy is a 26-year-old, biracial (part Caucasian, part Native American) female in graduate school for her Master's in Business Administration. She attended 90 group sessions over the course of more than 3 years. She said she worked on several different issues including depression, early childhood experiences, and developing healthy relationships. Joy was able to speak to a wide range of experiences in post-processing given her long-term participation in group. Her overall experience of post-processing was positive and she found it to be a meaningful component of her therapy. Joy described looking forward to post-processing in order get feedback from the leaders, gauge her progress in group, feel acknowledged and validated, and reflect on themes and patterns in the group. She recounted feeling a wide range of emotions during post-processing depending on how much she had shared that day, whether or not the leaders mentioned her specifically, and to what extent the comments helped her gain closure versus raising more questions. Joy explained that some semesters the focus of post-processing seemed to be more on themes and other semesters it addressed individuals.

She preferred when the leaders discussed each group member individually. Joy mentioned several times that her experience of post-processing was closely connected to her experience in the session that day. Here is a quote that captured this idea:

I guess it's really hard for me to separate the group process, the post-processing as apart from the group process. I think combining them always affects what I'm working on because...I'm here to get some help with certain issues that I have and over the long run, I've definitely changed. And I can't say that it's just group or it's just post-processing that that's been from. But being able to hear the therapists' perspective over time and hearing how I've grown in certain ways and hearing what I still need to work on in certain ways always affects me.

Claudia. Claudia is a 34-year-old, Caucasian female in graduate school for creative writing. Her goals for group counseling were to gain a better understanding of herself in relationships and to increase positive coping skills. She attended 19 group counseling sessions. Claudia's experience of post-processing was positive. She described listening intently during post-processing for new insights, greater clarity on her issues, or suggestions to think about for the week. She found it enlightening to hear the themes and parallels that the leaders pointed out, and she valued their expertise. Claudia said she occasionally left post-processing wanting more clarification or feeling as if certain issues were left unresolved. For this reason, she preferred days when post-processing lasted longer and provided individual feedback to members. Claudia seemed to be highly motivated and invested in her therapy. She said she would suggest the following to new members:

I find it beneficial and I think that, you know, it's kind of just like an exclamation point on, you know, the session in the sense that you get that last minute, professional, advice so to speak, or professional perspective. So, I would definitely encourage people to participate in that if they can, and then, you know, really just try to make the best of it by, you know, listening, and thinking about that throughout the week to kind of help themselves.

Teresa. Teresa is a 37-year-old, Caucasian female in graduate school for community counseling. She was in group to work on emotional expression and issues of trust in relationships. She attended 59 group counseling sessions over the course of 3 years, and had several different group leaders over that time. Teresa said that in general her experience of post-processing was positive, although there were a handful of times when she disagreed with comments that were made and felt angry or misunderstood. In each instance, she said that if the comment continued to bother her she always brought it up the next week at the beginning of group. She found that in this way the issue was always resolved productively and positively. Teresa described reflecting on post-processing comments during the week and trying to apply them to issues she was working on outside of group. She found the post-processing discussion to be most relevant when all the leaders participated and had a lot to say.

Jack. Jack is a 28-year-old, Caucasian male completing a second Bachelor's degree in journalism. His goals for group counseling were to decrease social anxiety and perfectionistic thinking, as well as increase his comfort with conflict. Jack attended a total of 12 group sessions. Jack explained that in the first few weeks of his experience,

post-processing was conducted by the group leaders while the members remained silent. He said that after “the fourth week in, maybe the fifth week in,” the leaders asked the group members to conduct post-processing. Overall, he preferred the method of post-processing in which the leaders led the conversation. He noted that the leaders seemed more apt to make interpretations or to challenge group members, whereas the members’ post-processing comments would consist more of compliments and encouragement. Jack clarified this distinction with the following metaphor:

I don’t know, it’s just like being on a team. Like, you know, the coach is the one that tells you like, “hey, you guys need to tighten up.” But as a team, like, you kind of just want to encourage each other. That’s kind of how I see it. And maybe, you know, we’re quiet people, and it just seems like a little, you know. Even though we spend a lot of time together, like, still sort of strangers, so. It’s maybe a little strange to step on anyone’s toes too much.

Jack pointed out a unique benefit of having the group members conduct post-processing. He said that it helped the members understand what was most helpful or beneficial for one another, and then encouraged them to “keep using that tactic with each other.” Jack’s overall experience of post-processing included feelings of connection with other group members and affirmation about positive interactions. He tended to describe his experience in terms of how it affected his thoughts or ideas. In particular, post-processing sometimes increased his insight about the group discussion, improved his understanding of how he is perceived by others, and showed him that group members may have very different perceptions about the same event. Other times, Jack felt that

post-processing was an obligation and offered very little additional benefit because it was redundant with what had already been said in group.

Leticia. Leticia is a 23-year-old, Caucasian female in her senior year, majoring in music. She was in group to explore patterns in her romantic relationships and to adjust to a recent break up. She attended 9 sessions of group counseling. A salient experience for Leticia was feeling surprised by how much the group leaders noticed and commented on during post-processing. She said this was affirming because it showed they were really paying attention and listening. She described her first few experiences in post-processing as “weird” and said that she became more comfortable with it over time as she learned what to expect and assimilated to her group’s norm of avoiding eye contact and assuming a more withdrawn posture. She also explained that it was challenging for her to participate in group, and she often felt “called out” in post-processing when the leaders commented that she was quiet that day. As a result, she said she made a more concerted effort to participate the following week.

Susan. Susan is a 26-year-old Caucasian female in graduate school for physics. She attended 4 group counseling sessions to explore unhealthy behavior patterns and to increase her confidence and independence. Prominent themes in Susan’s interview were her descriptions of what it was like to be a silent observer during post-processing, and her appreciation for the perspective of the group leaders. In particular, she said post-processing heightened her awareness of own progress. She explained that she tended to minimize her own progress, and it was helpful to have a trained professional point out her improvement even if it was something small. Susan valued the unique perspective of the

group process observer and looked forward to hearing from that person. Finally, she described the overall role of post-processing as “putting the finishing touches on wrapping it up,” which helped her gain a sense of closure after each session.

Pam. Pam is a 21-year-old, Caucasian female in her senior year, majoring in dental hygiene. She came to group to work on unresolved feelings from the past and family-of-origin issues. She attended 8 group counseling sessions. Pam described post-processing as a time to gain clarity and insight on issues that were discussed in group, to understand connections among members and themes of the discussion, and to leave “on a good note” regardless of the emotions she had during the session. She summarized several different aspects of her experience with the following comment:

And just like tie everything in, instead of just a bunch of stuff all over the place.

If I had discussed several things, it was just—kind of like tied everybody in. And they would bring in like similarities, like if we all discussed our parents, which happened one day. Then she would tie that in and just like rationalize it all. So, it just all made sense. Like, um, I get it now.

Pam said she often wished that post-processing was longer. There were times when she wanted to be able to respond or ask for more information, but she often forgot by the time she came back the following week. For that reason, she suggested that post-processing might be a useful way to the start group the following week. She said it might be nice to have a brief recap at the beginning of the session to help the group pick up where they left off the previous week.

Categories

Data analysis yielded two overarching domains: (1) experiences of post-processing, and (2) contextual pieces. These domains mirrored the two facets of interpretive phenomenology that guided the design of the study and the structure of the interviews (textural description and structural description; Moustakas, 1994). The first domain, experiences of post-processing, corresponded to the interview question “How would you describe your experience of post-processing?” This domain included eight categories. Each category is comprised of one or more related themes. The second domain, contextual pieces, corresponded to the interview question “What influences or affects your experience of post-processing?” This domain contained four themes. The domains, categories, and themes are listed in Table 2.

Experiences of post-processing

Verbal report card. Several participants described an evaluative component to the comments they heard during post-processing. Two themes emerged in the type of experiences described. One theme, *growth and progress*, included participants’ thoughts and feelings related to post-processing comments about improvements or accomplishments the leaders observed. Participants described an increased awareness about progress that they might not have noticed on their own or considered meaningful. The following quote from Susan is representative of the experiences described by several participants who comprised this theme.

I'll have said something, and then in post-processing they'll say, "you know, well, she described this and I think this was a big step." And then I'll be like, you know, maybe that was a bigger step than I was just taking it as.

A second theme, *accountability and being "called out,"* was used to capture the experiences described by more than half the participants. They explained that during post-processing the leaders would mention individuals who were quiet or who seemed less engaged in the session. Most participants described self-awareness that on certain days they were quiet and as a result they expected that it would be brought up in post-processing. When the anticipated comments were then made, some participants said they felt self-conscious or guilty. Others shared this feeling but also felt motivated to make more of an effort in the next session. Also within the theme of accountability and being "called out," several participants explained that the leaders highlighted group-as-a-whole processes that may not have been productive. Jae described this as follows:

I think it's important that they call out some of these issues, because people tend to hide from their big issues, and in our group we noticed that when things got too big, or too real, that conversation seemed to, you know, go away from that topic.

Jack described a similar process in his group, in which the members conducted post-processing:

I think it was a time when we would sort of challenge members of the group that we wanted to talk more. Or, you know, not talk more necessarily, but to talk more about their issues. It was a time when we would kind of ask for that.

Silent observer phenomenon. This category included thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to being in the role of a silent observer who is unable to respond. Three themes comprised this category. The theme *benefits of not being able to respond* represented the experiences of several participants who appreciated listening to the leaders without having to think about what to say. A related component of this theme was the perceived value of hearing from leaders without the interruption of group members. A representative quote for this theme is from Kathy:

I thought it was better that way just because we talked so much and I like to hear what they were writing down or what they were thinking, and I didn't want to talk. It helped to not have to talk. And just to listen.

Another aspect of the silent observer phenomenon included negative thoughts and feelings associated with being talked about as if not present. This theme, *discomfort with being talked about*, included participant experiences of post-processing as “weird” (more than half the sample used this word), “uncomfortable,” or “awkward.” In addition to the discomfort with being talked about, participants described feeling misunderstood or frustrated about not being able to reply, albeit this was less common. For example, Teresa recounted the following experience:

I think one of the counselors sort of, you know, was talking about that interaction or whatever, and made a comment about, you know, my defensiveness or something, that at that time I didn't at all like think I felt, or, you know. And it was sort of like, I thought was kind of misjudged, and further aggravated the situation or whatever.

Teresa went on to explain that she brought up the issue the following week “and it came back together and it was processed really well.” A slight variation on this theme was a heightened sense of vulnerability or self-consciousness as a result of hearing one’s personal issues discussed among leaders. Dave captured this experience:

Yeah, embarrassing, just kind of, them talking about whatever might be going on in your life, and genuinely, you know, worrying or something along those lines.

It’s just embarrassing to have them talk about it like you don’t have any say in the matter.

Closely related to the discomfort theme was the theme of *mood management*. Many participants described behavioral ways of managing feelings they had about being in the role of silent observer. The vast majority explained that they avoided eye contact in order to keep others from seeing their reactions while the leaders spoke about them specifically. Two participants said that in addition to doing this, they sometimes looked at another member that was being discussed by the leaders in order to try to gauge the member’s reaction to what was being said or to provide nonverbal support. The following quotes are representative of the mood management theme.

Joy: “I just know I don’t really look at people during post-processing. If they’re talking about my issue then I might not look people in the eye – it’s a lot about exposure, so averting my eyes is a way for me to contain that a little bit.”

Claudia: “I notice that some people, you know, kind of put their head down, and that’s their way of active listening, and maybe, you know, taking it all in. But I’m definitely trying to, you know, kind of see their facial expressions and see their

body movements and who they're talking about and kind of what the reaction is of the other person that they might be speaking about, or myself.”

Dave: “It’s just not a situation where I want to be identifying what other people are thinking about me.”

Leader expertise. This category encompassed two related themes. The theme of *added value of leader expertise* was expressed by all 12 participants. This theme included references to perceived expertise of group leaders, or increased value of the perspectives and opinions of the leaders because of their education and training. Several participants noted that they believed the leaders were able to pick up on themes and processes that group members may not have noticed. Quotes from Rebecca and Leticia were representative of this theme.

Rebecca: “I think that, because they’re professionals, and because they – I mean this is their job, to observe these kinds of things – that, like I said, they pick up on things that I don’t pick up on.”

Leticia: “And if there’s something like really subtle that maybe other people don’t notice, they seem to pick it up.”

The second theme within this category was the participants’ *unique appreciation for the process observer*. Most participants said they valued the opportunity to hear from the process observer because of his or her role as a listener without the added responsibility of speaking during the group session. The following quotes illustrate this idea:

Susan: “It’s nice to see her input during post-processing. Because you know, she’s like taking this all down, and she hasn’t been thinking about, you know, ways to prompt us or anything like the other group leaders have. So hers is often an interesting opinion too because she has just really observed the whole entire thing. She hasn’t thought about how to respond or anything like that.”

Pam: “I feel like she understands the most because she’s actually observing it and writing it. It kind of makes her understand it even more. And so, I noticed that when they go to post-processing, she’s the one that probably speaks the most, because she probably remembers the most from actually writing it. And I think if she wasn’t there, all the points wouldn’t have been brought up, because they might have not remembered all of them.”

Claudia: “And just from my perspective, I think that if you have someone focused solely on listening and capturing, you’re probably going to capture more.”

Emotional homework. The majority of the participants said that post-processing provided them with things to practice or work on outside of group, topics to bring back to the next session, or new ideas or perspectives to think about during the week. The phrase “emotional homework” was generated by Rebecca:

Post-processing is really for me more like, you know, this is what I’m receiving, you know, this is just for me to take home. And so sometimes it can really help me to feel more satisfied with group, and it can also help me – what I call, giving myself emotional homework, you know, like it gives me things to work on for the next week or to bring back for next week.

Joy expressed a similar experience:

It evokes thoughts within me about how I'm doing and about what I can work on, what I need to maybe think about that I hadn't thought about.

An aspect of this category that seemed particularly meaningful for several participants was that they changed their behavior in group as a result of the “emotional homework” comments they received in post-processing the previous week. For example, Jae said that he makes an effort to discuss his issues “directly the next meeting,” after leaders have discussed them in post-processing. Leticia described a similar experience of being prompted to participate, but for her it was a result of the feedback she received in the final post-processing of the semester. She said:

I was like, I can't believe this is over and I haven't – I didn't really gotten [sic] into stuff. But it was good because then I wrote down a list of things so when I started the summer one it was like, okay, day one: this, this, and this.

Not all participants shared the “emotional homework” experience. Vera stated: Well I don't really think about post-processing when I leave the group. I kinda don't think about it until next week when I walk back in the counseling office.

Kathy, one of the participants from the group in which the members led the post-processing conversation, also described the “emotional homework” experience.

However, it was not clear whether she had that experience in the first semester (when leaders conducted the post-processing), the second semester, or both. Jack, the other participant from that therapy group, described the value of post-processing feedback in helping him consider different perspectives and ways he might more clearly represent

himself to others. Although Jack's comment overlaps with another category ("light bulb moments") it seemed sufficiently related to the "emotional homework" theme to be included here.

You know, it really made me think about the fact that I think I expect people to just pick up on what I'm thinking, and I don't think everyone does. And I think I realized like, wow, like I should probably actually explicitly say some stuff that I'm thinking. Because people aren't mind-readers.

Light-bulb moments. This category included comments about new insights or realizations as a result of listening to post-processing. Half the participants described increased clarity or understanding about the issues they shared in group. Some experienced "ah-ha!" moments in which ideas suddenly made sense to them in a new way. The name of this category comes from a statement made by Vera:

You know, because it was kinda like a little light bulb went off in my head and it kinda made me sick that I hadn't realized it so far.

Claudia and Joy described similar "light bulb moments:"

Claudia: "And it helps me kind of just walk away and say, oh okay, well they really just, they hit the nail on the head. You know, I was rambling about something and they clarified it in one sentence."

Joy: "[If] they said something in there, that I, that really like [SNAP] got me, then I might be thinking about what they said all week."

Pam shared an example of a time when she experienced a new realization based on a comment made during post-processing:

Like one was—it just happened to be all girls, the guys never showed up that day. And I had brought out personal stuff, and they were like, ‘well, I wonder if Pam—what if—I wonder if she would have kept stuff to herself if the guys had been there.’ And I was like, wow, that’s a good point.

Validation and reinforcement. Consistent with the title of this category, it is comprised of two related themes. One theme, *validation*, represented participants’ experiences of post-processing as affirming or validating. Several participants described the positive emotions they felt when heard what they shared in group being reflected back by leaders. It seemed to demonstrate to these participants that what they shared was important and was heard. This was particularly meaningful for Joy, who explained that in her family she was not acknowledged and so the experience of feeling that others had listened to and understood her was powerful. She said:

Having that experience was refreshing and validating. Really made me feel like I was being listened to and heard. And that my – the experiences that I shared were being acknowledged.

Leticia felt similarly to Joy:

But you know, it’s kind of nice to – they *are* listening and they *are* paying attention. And, you know, they really *are* thinking about what’s going on.

Rebecca had a slightly different take on the *validation* experience. She explained that post-processing afforded leaders the time to recognize members who might not have talked a lot during the session.

We don't always have time [during the session] to check in with everybody. And so, it was always nice that they were able to let them know that they were thinking about them even though we didn't have time to bring it up, and so I think that that was really nice.

The other theme in this category, *reinforcement*, captured participants' thoughts about post-processing as a way to reiterate or highlight productive interactions that took place in group. This theme was similar to the theme of *growth and progress* within the "verbal report card" category. However, there seemed to be a key difference between the two. Experiences that fell within the "verbal report card" category all conveyed an evaluative tone and focused more on positive or negative thoughts the participants had in connection with receiving evaluative feedback from leaders. Experiences of *reinforcement* were focused less on evaluation and more on feelings or processes. For example, a participant who felt good about his or her participation in the session might find that the good feeling was amplified as a result of hearing positive feedback in post-processing. This was true for several participants, including Kathy and Jae.

Kathy: "I feel really good if they notice that I talked, 'cause I am silent a lot. And it makes me feel good that they notice that."

Jae: "If I have a good week in group, then they'll discuss that, and it's like, 'well, Jae really took risks,' or 'Jae did something, he's, you know, participating more,' or they give positive feedback, which makes me feel better for that week because it's like I did a great job this week. And I'm working to help myself."

Connections. Most participants described experiences that fit in one of three themes related to establishing connections. The theme of *connecting the group-as-a-whole* included participant comments that post-processing helped them understand topical themes of the group discussion, such as “parents,” or “conflict.” For example, Vera shared an example in which several members talked about experiences that seemed different in content, but that all related to feelings of loneliness. She explained that she had not noticed the similarity because each person “wasn’t lonely in the same way.” She summarized the example with the following statement:

So that’s kind of an example of how they connected everybody’s stuff at the end during post-processing. But I wasn’t really thinking about that, I was just kind of listening to everybody and not putting all the pieces together.

Other participants described *connecting the group-as-a-whole* slightly differently. Rebecca found it helpful to hear the leaders’ comments about how the group process seemed to either bring members closer to one another or keep them more emotionally distant. She explained that during one post-processing session the leaders commented on how a member had opened up and been very emotional and how that indicated that the group must have reached a point where the members felt safety and trust. Once this was pointed out, it occurred to Rebecca that she did feel an increased sense of connection and trust. After that, she decided that she could take a risk to open up more during the next session. Regarding this experience she said:

—and so I think that really helped me to focus on trusting the group and creating an atmosphere where we all felt comfortable to share. And I think that other

people responded the same way to that. And I mean, once that's established, then it turns more towards, you know, the actual processes that are going on during group.

Another theme under the category of "connections" was *connecting members to one another*. Comments in this theme seemed to be distinct from the other "connections" comments because they focused less on unifying experiences at the group level, and more on parallels or links made between specific members. Several members noted that post-processing helped them recognize similarities they shared with another member; feel more connected to another member; or try to role model themselves after another member. Representative quotes were:

Vera: "It's [a summary] of what happened, and connecting the group members together. Just kind of hearing what the counselors or psychiatrist or psychologist, how they connect us as members."

Jack: "There was a lot of understanding like, 'hey, this person and that person made a connection today.' For example, we'd say, 'I really noticed that you picked up on her issue and seemed to understand it.' Or, you know, 'it seemed to mean something to you, and it seemed like you guys have that in common.'"

Rebecca: "So I think post-processing really helped me bring the progress I saw in other group members, to bring it back to myself, and like...how can I mirror their progress?"

A third part of the "connections" category was *putting it all together*. This theme reflected participants' descriptions of post-processing as a time hear a synthesis or

summary of the group session. More than half the members expressed that it was somehow beneficial or valuable to hear an overview or synopsis of what had happened in group. Teresa spoke to this experience in the following statement:

And part of the reason why I chose to stay or would want to stay was because I wanted to benefit from hearing a summarized view of the group itself.

Claudia expressed a similar sentiment:

You might not have thought you were part of a theme going on, but they might include you in that at the, you know, at the post-processing part of it. And you can kind of, that it can be eye opening.

Final chapter experiences. Many participants described thoughts and feelings that resembled what a reader might experience during the final chapter of a book. In the final chapter of some novels, the reader gets closure as plot lines are resolved and questions are answered. In other novels, questions remain unanswered, the reader is left wondering, or poignant emotions are heightened. The range of experiences associated with the final chapter of a book seemed to parallel the way several members described post-processing. These experiences were captured in four related themes. *Closure* included feelings of resolution and completion, such as increased clarity about an issue. Susan's experience of closure was representative of this theme:

I kind of think that without the post-processing it would maybe end kind of abruptly. Like, "okay, we're out of time, everybody," you know. So like the post-processing really does just kind of like put the finishing touches on it all. It

just kind of like makes it feel a little bit more final at the end. Or everyone would be just kind of left hanging.

A closely related theme was *transition*. Half the participants commented on post-processing as opportunity to shift gears, step back from their emotions, and prepare to leave group. Pam explained the transition experience vividly.

I feel like post-processing is the calm down point in group. But I felt like if we didn't have it – if we were upset, or like fighting or arguing about a certain situation, I felt like we might have brought that outside of the room, and might've still felt down or upset about the situation. But I like how we were able to get out our pain and suffering in the group and then just like kind of go on with our lives – I guess something like positive when we left.

Vera felt similarly:

Well, for me, it does, it helps me get back into stop thinking about how – stop thinking and analyzing my life or whatever, and come back and, puts the focus on everybody so I can calm down and get ready to leave.

Although many people found that post-processing helped them feel calm or emotionally contained, many participants found that post-processing sometimes heightened their affect or triggered an emotional response. Within this theme, *reactivation of emotions*, participants describe a range of different feelings that were both positive and negative. The following quotes highlight the range of emotions experienced.

Joy: “Sometimes, you know, if they hit on a key issue that I'm working on, then sometimes I cry.”

Pam: “If they brought up like specific little points that really touched me, I would get upset again. But nothing that made me like mad or upset.”

Dave: “Like, you may have moved on from an issue such as abortion or, you know, death, and then it’s brought up again at the end at post-processing. It’s just very uneasy, unsettling.”

Teresa: “Kind of, you know, cried a little bit hearing the positives of like, seeing growth or something like that.”

The category of “final chapter experiences” also included the theme of *wanting more or unfinished business*. A few participants said they sometimes left post-processing feeling as if issues were unresolved or more questions were raised than were answered. These experiences shared a tone of wanting more from the group leaders, such as more answers, more opinions, or more feedback. For example, Claudia said:

But there’s been a few times where it’s – I’ve kind of walked out of there like, oh, I really wish – and a little bit anxious – just wish I could have gotten some more clarification. Or, am I going to remember to bring this up next week if in fact it is something that weighs on my mind?

Contextual pieces

This domain encompassed participants’ descriptions of how their experiences of post-processing may have varied from week to week as a result of different circumstances. Experiences from all 12 participants are represented in this domain. Four themes emerged: (a) intensity or depth; (b) outside stressors; (c) group constellation; and (d) time in group.

The theme of *intensity or depth* reflected participants' comments that they experienced post-processing differently depending on the emotional intensity of the group or depth of what they personally shared in group. Similarly, this theme included comments about how participants' experiences differed depending on the amount the leaders shared in post-processing. Several participants related the intensity of the session to a more rewarding experience of post-processing. They found post-processing to be particularly important when they had disclosed a lot or been vulnerable in group. For example, Vera said the following:

I guess it depends on the intensity of the group, and how much I felt comfortable disclosing, or how much time, or not time, but how much other people disclosed too, or how much “working” we got done.

Regarding the intensity or depth of the leaders' comments, most participants preferred post-processing sessions in which all the leaders spoke and they provided individualized feedback. Joy was specific about her preference for a post-processing format in which every member is discussed as opposed to only discussing themes or members who were the focus of the session. Some participants said they felt “left out” when they were not mentioned in post-processing.

The theme of *outside stressors* corresponded to influences such as exams or lack of sleep that affected the way participants perceived post-processing. Many participants reported that their experience of post-processing depended on outside stressors. The most commonly described contextual stressor was having to be somewhere else immediately after group (e.g., class, work, study group). In all the cases that made up

this theme outside stressors detracted from the participant's experience of post-processing.

Group constellation had an influence on post-processing for most participants. This included whether group members or leaders were present or absent, as well as size of the group overall. Participants who had been in more than one group noted that some sets of leaders were "stronger" than others, and that some member constellations seemed to provide a better fit than others. Regarding the presence or absence of group members, Jack said:

I think there were a couple of personalities that, when there, really made the group work. And so if those people were missing, or a couple people were missing, it really changed the way group went; and by proxy, the way post-processing went.

The other contextual piece that seemed to constitute a distinct theme was *time in group*. This referred to changes in the way participants experienced post-processing over time. Some participants explained that they benefitted more from post-processing the longer they were in group, whereas others said it was more helpful when they were new to group. This was Vera's experience:

In the beginning it was kind of like, oh, really interesting, and I think now as my stress level's gone up, and as my knowledge about counseling's gone up, I've been able to make some of those connections on my own, and I'm also sometimes in a rush. And just like, so I guess maybe I've gotten bored with it.

Several participants described feeling anxious in the beginning, and then becoming more comfortable with post-processing over time. Dave shared his experience of assimilating to post-processing:

I was just more comfortable with the whole process as I moved along. Much more comfortable. The first time I was in group, we had post-processing, and I actually replied to what was going on, and then all of a sudden they're saying that you can't talk because you're not supposed to talk in this part. And I just said "oh, okay, all right." But it wasn't you know, shockingly embarrassing. I was just kind of realizing how it was supposed to work. I got more acquainted with it as I went along, so it wasn't that big of an issue.

One participant, Jack, said that his experience of post-processing did not change over time. He said "it affected me the same way. I felt the same way about it." He attributed this to a pattern he noticed in the way his group conducted post-processing. Jack belonged to the group in which the members led post-processing. He described the following pattern:

Okay, like, I'll just kind of break down our pattern. So typically we would be like, "hey, thanks for leading the conversation" to this one person. And then to the person that was like kind of opening up, we'd be like, "hey, thanks for opening up today, it took a lot of courage. This is like, what I saw, and these are the improvements I've seen in you." And then, say there was one person that really took to what that person was saying that day, we would be like, "hey, like, we saw how you guys like understood each other." We talked about that,

and then maybe to the people that were more quiet, like they didn't personally open up as much but they were the ones that offered advice, we would say, "hey like, I like the advice you gave. I want to hear more about your issues." So I mean typically, that's I'd say like there were those four types of personalities. Like the ones that led the conversation, the ones that were the focus of the conversation, the ones that empathized with the person opening up, and the ones offering advice. So, I think that's basically in a nutshell like how it would go from week to week."

All together, the results form a complex picture of the experiences of group psychotherapy members in post-processing. The experiences described, as well as the contextual pieces that affected members' experiences, may provide researchers and clinicians with a better understanding of the nuanced ways in which clients perceive post-processing. In the following chapter, the results are discussed within the theoretical framework and existing literature.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the experiences of group psychotherapy members in post-processing. The guiding questions for the study were *How would you describe your experience of post-processing?* and *What influences or affects the way you experience post-processing?* In-depth interviews with 12 participants were transcribed and analyzed using a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. The results were organized within two domains that corresponded to the two guiding research questions. The first domain, *Experiences of post-processing*, was comprised of eight categories: (a) verbal report card; (b) silent observer phenomenon; (c) leader expertise; (d) emotional homework; (e) light bulb moments; (f) validation and reinforcement; (g) connections; and (h) final chapter experiences. Some categories were made up of one or more related themes. The second domain, *Contextual pieces*, was comprised of four related themes: (a) intensity or depth; (b) outside stressors; (c) group constellation; and (d) time in group.

Phenomenological research entails the close involvement of the researcher as the instrument of data collection, analysis, and presentation of the findings. The values and ideas of the researcher are inevitably a part of the research. The use of the reflexive journal served as a tool for the researcher to articulate her thoughts and feelings about the research process and findings. This discussion begins with a narrative section in which the bracketed assumptions of the researcher are shared. The researcher's reflections on the results of the study follow. The results are then situated within the theoretical

framework of interpersonal process group psychotherapy (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), followed by a section in which the findings are discussed in relation to the existing literature. The research and clinical implications of this study are explained, including suggestions for future research. Strengths and limitations of the study are discussed, followed by a brief conclusion.

Bracketing of researcher's assumptions

I think it is important to acknowledge that my experiences, values, thoughts, and feelings have shaped this project from inception to final product. In order to examine how this may relate to the discussion of the findings, I have identified several personal assumptions and beliefs that are part of my worldview. First, a professional value that I hold is that research and clinical work should inform one another. My training as a doctoral student of counseling psychology provided the context for how I think about group therapy and scholarly research. I believe that the ethical practice of group counseling should be informed by theory and research. I also believe that clinical practice heightens a researcher's awareness of areas in which further inquiry is needed, and provides a feedback loop for understanding which aspects of the research findings are effective in applied contexts.

Part of my motivation for conducting this study was to seek answers to questions that arose during my experiences as a group process observer and co-leader. I wondered what it was like for group members to sit and listen to post-processing. I wondered what their thoughts, feelings, and reactions were. What were they taking away from post-processing? Did it enrich their therapy? Was it harmful in any way? What types of

comments were most useful? This study was the first step in beginning to understand post-processing from the perspective of group members.

Second, I contend that an important way to gain understanding and knowledge is by listening to individual experiences of the phenomenon. This belief was foundational to my decision to conduct a study in which several individuals described their experiences with the phenomenon of post-processing. It is my assumption that there is something to be gained in learning about these experiences, such as ideas for how to conduct post-processing, how to design additional research studies on post-processing, or ways to train future group counselors to do post-processing.

Third, I believe that relationships are central to a person's functioning, happiness, and well-being. It is my bias that a person should want to improve their interpersonal skills, build stronger relationships, build healthier relationships, or increase their capacity for connecting with others. I think post-processing is a tool that can promote these outcomes. Therefore, throughout the course of this study I tried to be careful about not assuming that other people shared this value. For example, if a participant said that post-processing provided them with information about how to communicate directly, I had to keep myself from making the assumption that this was a positive result for the participant. Instead, I tried to understand what this meant to the individual.

Fourth, central to my professional identity is the core value that therapy is an effective way help to people with their personal problems. Also, I believe that group counseling is an effective form of therapy. I am a strong proponent of group counseling because I believe the group setting offers a rich, dynamic, therapeutic environment for

interpersonal learning and growth. In a university setting, the students are high-functioning and are immersed in an academic culture that values learning, exploration, and personal enrichment. Given the context, I think group counseling is the ideal treatment modality for a substantial portion of university clients. A significant segment of the population at universities is comprised of emerging adults who are facing normative developmental challenges that have interpersonal underpinnings. For example, common concerns include identity development, family relationships, romantic relationships, or social functioning. Group counseling is a rich setting in which to explore such issues.

Fifth, the personal lens through which I view myself and the world is influenced by the premium I place on self-awareness. I believe self-awareness is essential for me to competently practice psychology because I must understand what my biases and values are in order to manage them and keep them from interfering with my clinical work. I also believe self-awareness, self-examination, and insight are important pieces of successful interpersonal functioning and growth. I view post-processing as a way for group members to become more self-aware by receiving feedback and gaining clarification on their role in interpersonal processes. An excellent way to help a person change her assumptions or behaviors is to increase her self-awareness so she can recognize and monitor her assumption or behaviors.

Finally, my curiosity about post-processing is closely related to my personal value of social justice, equality, and empowerment. As a developing clinician I have struggled with my own discomfort with the power differential that is inherent to the therapy

relationship. This discomfort was particularly salient for me during my development as a group leader because I felt that post-processing placed the group members in a disempowered position of not being able to respond while the group leaders talked about them. I often had the thought, “Who am *I* to talk about these people without allowing them to respond?” It felt incongruent with my collaborative approach to the therapeutic alliance and my belief that the client is the expert on herself.

I understood that a rationale for having members attend post-processing was to provide transparency; the members had a right to hear treatment discussions related their therapy. Yet, I still found myself wondering whether it was awkward or uncomfortable for the members to sit and listen. I wondered if we were putting them in a “one-down” position. This question was what initially motivated me to explore the research on post-processing and then conduct this study.

Researcher’s reflections

Overall, I was impressed with the insight and depth of reflection about post-processing that most of the participants demonstrated. Additionally, I was excited to see that many of the participants conveyed an understanding of process versus content. Having been a process observer, a group co-leader, and a researcher of group therapy, I have developed a keen eye for observing interpersonal interactions at both the content and process levels. Understanding the difference between process and content was something I grappled with early on in my training, and being able to attend to both is something I continue to work on. Therefore, I was struck by how well the participants I interviewed for this study were able to talk about their experiences in a way that

differentiated content and process information. None of them specifically made this distinction using the terms ‘process’ or ‘content,’ but it was evident in how they responded to the questions that they were able to describe their own processes and those of the group-as-a-whole separately from describing what was said. For example, one participant described the typical pattern that post-processing followed in his group. Another participant commented on a process that described her group collectively (they tended to move away from emotionally intense topics).

Several participants noted during our interview that their experience of post-processing was confounded by their presenting problem (e.g., Joy said, “My issues are coming out all over this interview.”). The participants who mentioned this seemed to have the following awareness: (a) the content of post-processing is connected to my presenting problem; (b) my presenting problem affects the way I experience post-processing; and (c) therefore, it is difficult to separate whether the experiences I am sharing in this interview are the result of post-processing or the result of my presenting problem. To illustrate, one participant noted: (a) during post-processing her anxiety about participating in group was discussed; (b) her anxiety was activated by hearing this; (c) she experienced post-processing as anxiety-provoking when the focus was on her, but she acknowledged that it was unclear whether this was because of post-processing or because of her presenting problem (anxiety). It was very exciting to hear participants describe their experiences with such self-awareness.

Additionally, I was surprised to discover that several participants were curious about my research, said they thought it was important, and were interested in seeing the

results. This was consistent with the relatively strong response rate that I had from member checking. In some cases it had been 10 months since the interview was conducted; yet, three participants provided feedback about my categories. This level of investment seemed indicative of the quality of the participants' experiences in group counseling. All 12 participants had positive experiences with group counseling, and several seemed to communicate a subtle sense of pride for their particular group or their co-leaders.

The fact that one of the groups was conducted with a different format of post-processing posed an interesting challenge. I did not realize at the time of recruitment that one of the groups had post-processing led by the members. I became aware of this variation during an interview with one of the participants from that group. I was not sure how this might affect the study, but decided to proceed as planned until any complications associated with having two different methods became evident. As it turns out, the variation in format did not affect the relevant literature review, method, or data analysis. I was excited to see that the two participants from that group had similar experiences to the rest of the sample, but were also able to describe articulately what they disliked about that particular format. I was mindful while writing the Results chapter that any quotes from these participants needed to be introduced as pertaining to a different format. Overall, I think the added experiences of these two participants made the study richer and helped provide greater dimension to the context in which the experiences of post-processing occurred.

Finally, it was a surprise to me that none of the participants seemed to perceive post-processing as an abuse of power on the part of the group leaders. Having been a process observer, I feared that talking about participants in their presence might feel belittling to them. Interestingly, this must have been more related to my own misgivings about my leadership role than about the dynamics of post-processing. It was eye-opening to me to get clarification on my own experience by comparing my pre-conceived notions with the comments made by group members about their experiences.

Discussion of findings in relation to theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for the study was Yalom's interpersonal process approach to group psychotherapy (Yalom, 1995; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). As described in Chapter 2, Yalom identified 11 therapeutic factors that foster growth and change in group members. It is the task of the group leaders to facilitate development of the therapeutic factors. Yalom discussed how this may be accomplished in therapy, but did not go into depth on how the factors may also be developed during end-of-meeting review (post-processing). The experiences of the participants in the present study reflect only the post-processing segment of group therapy, and therefore are not expected to correlate one-to-one with Yalom's therapeutic factors (Yalom & Leszcz). However, several participants described experiences that would suggest post-processing facilitated the development of the therapeutic factors.

Previous research has demonstrated a connection between group cohesion and beneficial therapeutic outcomes (Bernard et al., 2008). Group cohesion is described by Yalom and Leszcz (2005) as a sense of belonging among members. Cohesion is

considered one of the most important therapeutic factors because it provides group members with the feeling that they are supported and valued. It is suggested that group cohesiveness must be present in order for the other therapeutic factors to operate (Yalom & Leszcz). Two categories from the present findings seem to capture aspects of cohesion: “validation and reinforcement,” and “connections.”

The category of “validation and reinforcement” included experiences of feeling affirmed and acknowledged. Participants described positive feelings (e.g., “good,” “encouraged,” “validated”) about hearing the leaders restate what was shared in group. They seemed to experience these restatements and reflections as evidence that what they shared was valuable and worthwhile. Participants also said that it was reinforcing to see that the leaders noticed their participation and demonstrated that they were listening. In the group in which the members conducted post-processing, Jack noted that it was “encouraging” to hear directly from another member about what he or she appreciated from the group. These experiences likely contributed to participants feeling valued and supported by the group, which are indications of cohesion being present.

The category of “connections” also captured experiences that would be central to a sense of belonging or group cohesiveness. Several participants spoke about post-processing as helping them recognize unifying themes that connected the content of various members’ stories. Vera said that part of post-processing was, “connecting the group members together.” In fact, Yalom stated that naming themes and discussing the group-as-a-whole is a way to enhance cohesiveness (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Rebecca described her “connections” experience and also took it a step further. She explained

how her experiences in one session, combined with the comments made during post-processing, helped her decide to be more vulnerable in the following session:

And especially, I remember the first time that I felt like I was comfortable enough in the group to share; it was after one of the other group members had shared.

And it was like a very emotional moment, and there was a lot of emotional connection made. And so after that, you know, during that post-processing, I was just kind of sitting there, and I was thinking, “you know, like, this was a big step for this person in the group. And so, you know, what would it be like for me to do that?” And so that’s when I started considering like, “maybe I could open up and share those kinds of emotions. And even though it will be hard, you know, like obviously this person did it and it went well, and everyone really benefitted from it.”

Rebecca’s statement illustrates how her experience of connection in the group provided a gateway for her to participate more openly in group. This is consistent with Yalom’s suggestion of cohesion as an underlying therapeutic factor that is necessary for other therapeutic factors to operate (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Rebecca also identified her personal reflections during post-processing as the link that helped her apply her experience in post-processing to her participation in group the following week. This suggests that group-as-a-whole comments made during post-processing served as a tool for fostering the therapeutic factor of cohesion.

The category of “connections” also encompassed experiences that suggested the presence of the therapeutic factor of universality. Universality provides clients with a

sense of relief that they are not alone with their feelings (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Yalom explained that becoming aware that other people have similar feelings and experiences allows a group member to feel safe confiding in others and then benefit from the experience of being accepted and validated. Rebecca's statement would indicate that the therapeutic factor of universality was activated in her experience of post-processing. Several other participants said that post-processing highlighted connections they shared with other group members. Claudia explained, "You might not have thought there were parallels with you and some other group member, but you might hear that in post-processing." This type of statement would seem to lay the foundation for participants to then experience a sense of relief in knowing that they are not alone.

Yalom includes *imparting information* as a therapeutic factor made up of didactic instruction and direct advice (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The present findings did not yield a category that reflected this entirely, but one participant noted that post-processing was a time when group leaders would occasionally remind members about group rules or clinical services. She explained that practical information was conveyed sometimes, such as "[Leaders] would also reiterate that if we needed to talk somebody between groups or if we were going to be on a vacation or whatever, we could call the emergency number and ask for one of the counselors or whatever." Additionally, the 'direct advice' aspect of the therapeutic factor of imparting information may have been present in some experiences that fell under the category of "validation and reinforcement." One person said that leaders might use post-processing to reiterate useful advice that one member had

provided to another. It would seem that these examples suggest post-processing may be an arena for the therapeutic factor of imparting information.

The experiences described in the present research also convey the presence of interpersonal learning in post-processing. Yalom wrote in great detail about the importance of interpersonal learning and the various ways group leaders can facilitate it in therapy (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). One way to foster interpersonal learning is with a here-and-now focus on the group discussion. Regarding the here-and-now focus he wrote:

The group members must experience one another with as much spontaneity and honesty as possible, and they must also reflect back on that experience. This reflecting back, this *self-reflective loop*, is crucial if an emotional experience is to be transformed into a therapeutic one (p. 30).

Post-processing, as conducted at the counseling center where the present study took place, is thought to demonstrate the self-reflective loop that Yalom described (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Evidence that participants experienced post-processing as initiating a self-reflective loop was captured within the category of “emotional homework.” Jae say that post-processing was “a way to reflect on yourself.” Similarly, Claudia said that when leaders referred to her body language as an indication that she might have had something to say (but didn’t say it), she had the following thought: “Okay, well they were able to tell that, you know, what was it that, you know, kept you from speaking or disclosing fully. So then it’s kind of a self-analyzation [sic] from that point.”

Similarly, Yalom describes insight as a central component of interpersonal learning (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Several members described experiencing new insights as a result of post-processing; most of these experiences were captured in the “light bulb moments” category. This category was defined by the experiencing of hearing something in post-processing that triggered a new realization, self-awareness, or “aha!” moment. Experiences of insight were also present within descriptions that fell under the “emotional homework” category. Such experiences included taking away an increased self-awareness, or noticing processes that were pointed out in post-processing happening in interpersonal situations outside of group.

Another aspect of interpersonal learning as described by Yalom is utilization of the group as a social microcosm in which feedback exchange helps individuals gain insight, self-awareness, and increased sensitivity to how they impact others (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Although most participants in the present study experienced post-processing as silent observers, two of the participants had the opportunity for feedback exchange in post-processing because the discussion was conducted by the members. Jack said that as a result of post-processing he became more aware of how he is seen by others. For example, he noted:

I realized that I came across differently than I thought I did, and that, you know, that was from person to person like, they kind of said the same thing, and I was like wow, like, I don't think I'm perceived the way I think I am.

In Jack's case, post-processing provided an opportunity for interpersonal learning. This would be a potential benefit to having the group members conduct post-processing

rather than the leaders. However, the same type of interpersonal learning that Jack described in post-processing could certainly have occurred during the group session. The aspect of interpersonal learning associated with the self-reflective loop seems more pertinent for group leaders to try to emphasize in post-processing. There may be some added value to interpersonal learning that is received in the context of simply listening and reflecting rather than interacting and responding. In fact, several members experienced post-processing as beneficial because they were able to listen, as discussed within the category of “silent observer phenomenon.”

Yalom described instillation of hope as a therapeutic factor that is fostered by the therapist’s attitude and expectations that group therapy is an effective treatment modality (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The present findings do not speak directly to whether participants perceived that leaders demonstrated an expectation or belief that group counseling was an effective therapy. However, it may be inferred that the “leader expertise” experiences would not have emerged as salient if instillation of hope had not been present. The “leader expertise” category captured the added weight that group members placed on the opinions and observations of the group leaders by virtue of the fact that they were trained as counselors. Perhaps this finding indicates the presence of hope and positive expectations for group counseling as a given. This could also be a reflection of the sample of participants in this study. It is likely that the people who volunteered to be interviewed for this study had some investment in group counseling and belief that it was worthwhile or else they might have offered their time for this research.

Similarly, Yalom explained that in groups where process conversations among leaders take place in the presence of the group, the members develop greater trust in the therapeutic process as a result of seeing leaders disagree and work through ideas (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). He wrote, “The clients who observed their therapists in disagreement learned that although no one true ways exists, the therapists are nonetheless dedicated and committed to finding ways of helping their clients (p. 216).” This notion is consistent with the researcher’s observation that the participants seemed proud to belong to their respective groups. For example, they often introduced statements about their co-leaders by saying, “well *my* process observer...” or “at least in *my* group they...” which insinuated a sense of investment and belonging.

Interestingly, the “leader expertise” category represents a different experience than that described by Yalom in his discussion of the therapeutic factor of altruism (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Yalom said that “not infrequently (p. 14)” group members tend to receive feedback from other group members more readily than from leaders. He explained that group leaders are viewed as “paid professionals (p. 14)” whereas group members are real and honest in their observations and are more frequently credited by other members as helpful (Yalom & Leszcz). This was not found in the present study. Several participants said they value leader comments more heavily than comments of other members.

A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that Yalom’s work was based on inpatient and community populations where group members may have perceived a great deal of difference between themselves and the treatment providers (Yalom & Leszcz,

2005). In a university setting, students are used to the role of having an authority figure (e.g., professor, advisor, resident advisor, coach) from whom they learn. They may view group leaders as similar to these other authority figures in their lives. Additionally, by virtue of the fact that they are seeking higher education, they may see little gap between themselves and the treatment providers. This gap would be particularly small when some group members are graduate students in helping professionals and some co-leaders or process observers are also graduate students. The “leader expertise” finding offers a new piece of information that could be used to make hypotheses about how the role of group leaders in a university context is different from other settings.

Other therapeutic factors described by Yalom were not salient in participants’ descriptions of their experiences with post-processing. These factors were: (a) *development of socializing techniques*, which refers to the opportunity to learn basic social skills or increase the sophistication of one’s interpersonal skills as a result of interacting in the group; (b) *recapitulation of the primary family group*, which may occur when group members behave toward one another or the leaders in ways that imitate dynamics from their families of origin; and (c) *Imitative behavior*, which refers to clients’ assimilation of the therapist’s behaviors, such as listening skills, diction, or non-verbal communication (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). However, aspects of group development as described by Yalom provide a framework from which to discuss the themes found within the *Contextual pieces* domain of the present study.

Contextual pieces referred to any experiences, environmental influences, outside stressors, or logistical considerations that may have affected the way participants

experienced post-processing. Yalom stated that it is the task of the group leaders to shape the group and facilitate the development of a therapeutic environment from the time of member selection through to termination (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). An important way for leaders to do this during group sessions is to make process observations, and encourage group members to discuss the processes occurring within the group. He explained that a process review is particularly beneficial following emotionally charged or intense interactions (Yalom & Leszcz). Interestingly, one of the present findings concerning contextual pieces was that group members experienced post-processing differently depending on the intensity or depth of the group session. Seven participants described post-processing more positively (e.g., “more beneficial,” “constructive,” “deeper,” “I gained more”) following particularly intense or emotional sessions, or sessions where they personally disclosed more than usual.

Another theme within “contextual pieces” was *outside stressors*. Several participants shared that outside stressors detracted from their experience of post-processing. These included influences such as: having to go to a class directly after group; worrying about an exam; or being tired. Similarly, Yalom recommended that an individual’s level of external stress be considered during selection of clients for group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). He noted that distractions associated with external stress may impede concentration and decrease the therapeutic benefit of group involvement for both the individual and the group.

The theme of “group constellation” emerged as a contextual influence on how the participants experienced post-processing. There is a large body of literature, including

both theory and empirical research, on composition of therapy groups (Bernard et al., 2008; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The recently published *Practice Guidelines for Group Psychotherapy* recommend that groups be heterogeneous with regard to presenting problem, and with regard to where individuals fall on the two interpersonal dimensions: hostile-to-friendly; and controlling-to-submissive (Bernard et al., 2008). The *guidelines* further recommend that groups be homogeneous with regard to ego strength (Bernard et al.; Yalom & Leszcz). Eight participants remarked that the presence or absence of particular group members, or of a leader, changed the dynamic of the group and then, in turn, affected post-processing. Perhaps the differences they noticed were related to the disruption of the group composition, which may have shifted the extent to which the group therapeutic factors were operating.

Finally, a fourth contextual influence on the way the participants experienced post-processing was *time in group*. It is understood that group development is a dynamic process and that the individual members and the group-as-a-whole will experience group therapy differently over time. There is a vast body of literature on group development spanning from the early 1900s (Bernard et al., 2008). A discussion of this literature is beyond the scope of this study. The present findings included a range of ways in which the participants' experiences of post-processing changed over time. Some participants gained more over time, like Teresa. Others described a qualitative shift in the type of comments that were made over time and/or the way they benefitted from post-processing (e.g., Kathy and Rebecca). Others said that they became bored with it, such as Vera, or that they experienced it the same way from week to week (Dave). Perhaps these

individual differences related to the participants' presenting problems, their progress in group, their perceptions of the group leaders, or the culture of their specific group.

Discussion of findings in relation to existing literature

There is very little existing literature that is focused specifically on post-processing. Related literature on interpersonal process group therapy has focused primarily on feedback and development of group cohesion. Research on feedback in group psychotherapy suggests that specific feedback given to individual group members is related to clients' progress on therapeutic goals (Kivlighan, 1985; Rohde & Stockton, 1992). The present study was focused on the way group members experience post-processing, and not on the relationship between feedback in post-processing and progress on therapeutic goals. However, the interview guide included a question that asked: *How has your experience in post-processing affected [your progress on] what you are working on in group?* Some participants explained that it was impossible to say because post-processing was interconnected to the entire group experience. Other participants responded by saying that post-processing was a time when progress was often pointed out. Therefore, the present study offers little information about how post-processing feedback may be related to members' progress on goals.

A small body of work examines process group techniques, such as the use of a process observer and process notes. The experiences of the participants in the present study were consistent with findings described in similar previous studies. Overall, process observers are not perceived to be intrusive or disruptive by group members (Bieschke, et al., 1998; Bloom & Dobie, 1969; Hogan et al., 2006). The results of the

present study support this finding. In fact, the additive value of the process observer as perceived by group members is described in detail within the “leader expertise” category. Participants described having a unique appreciation for the process observer because of his or her role in attending exclusively to the events of the group without having to speak.

The present findings can be compared and contrasted with the work of Hogan and colleagues (2006). As described in Chapter 2, Hogan et al. included a qualitative component examining what group members liked and disliked about the process observer experience. Eight themes described what the group member liked, and seven themes described what they did not like (Hogan et al.). These themes had several similarities to the findings of the present study. First, it is important to note that the role of the process observers in the Hogan study (2006) was different from the present study in that their role was to provide a process note. The process observer provided a written note either by mail or at the beginning of the next group session, or they read the process note aloud at either the end of the session or the beginning of the next session. The authors did not describe conducting a post-processing session (Hogan et al.).

One theme that was similar to experiences described in the present study was *wanted more opinions from the process observer* (Hogan et al., 2006). The example quote provided by Hogan and colleagues for this theme was: “I like how she started talking from her point of view towards the end of the sessions.” This seemed to relate to the “leader expertise” category from the present study. Leader expertise included two themes: *added value of leader expertise* and *unique appreciation for process observer*. The first of these themes contained quotes about wanting more feedback from group

leaders, such as more in-depth comments, more individual feedback, or simply more time dedicated to post-processing. The second theme captured participants' experiences specifically related to hearing from the process observer during post-processing. These comments conveyed appreciation for the unique role of the process observer as a silent observer and for the opportunity to hear his or her opinions during post-processing. Together, the present findings and those of Hogan and colleagues converge on the idea that group members value leaders' views and want to hear what leaders think about the group's interactions.

Another theme from Hogan and colleagues (2006), called *too challenging*, included statements such as, "Sometimes I thought people were 'called out' more so than was needed." This comment contained the same phrasing ("called out") that some participants in the present study used to describe the evaluative aspect of their experiences of post-processing (i.e., "verbal report card"). Some participants described feeling bad ("upset," "angry at myself," and "anxious") when they perceived that their lack of participation was being pointed out in post-processing. Other participants seemed to value the "verbal report card" experience as holding them accountable for working on their goals in therapy. One person described it as "a reminder that I didn't talk" and another said that being called out "actually helped." This was consistent with the *challenge/direct* theme that Hogan and colleagues found in group members' responses to what they liked about the process notes. The sample statement provided was: "I liked the way they made us face up to the things we said." It would seem that challenging or evaluative post-processing comments are useful, but in some cases may create negative

feelings for some group members. Group leaders may want to make these kinds of process comments delicately in order to accomplish the message of accountability without upsetting group members.

Hogan and colleagues (2006) also described a theme labeled *made it uncomfortable*, which contained statements such as: “People seemed somewhat unrelaxed.” This was similar to experiences that were captured in the present study within the category “Silent observer phenomenon.” This category included themes of *discomfort with being talked about* and *mood management*. The discomfort described by participants would align with the theme of *made it uncomfortable* (Hogan et al.). In addition, the present study provided information that explained behavioral ways participants managed discomfort. Specifically, several participants described avoiding eye contact, looking down, or adopting a more withdrawn posture during post-processing. They discussed this behavior as way to reduce feelings of vulnerability and avoid giving or receiving nonverbal signals that might communicate reactions to what was being said in post-processing.

The present study included the category “connections,” which contained a theme called *putting it all together*. This seemed to parallel Hogan and colleagues’ (2006) theme *put group process into perspective*, which was defined with the statement: “It kind of put into perspective what was going on and helped me put it all together.” The themes from both studies suggest that process comments – whether written or verbal – may facilitate group members in synthesizing or consolidating their experience of the group session. This notion is closely related to the experiences conveyed within the “final

chapter experiences” category which encompassed feelings of closure and tying together of loose ends.

The category of “emotional homework,” which captured experiences of taking away something to think about or reflect on during the week overlapped with more than one theme from the Hogan et al. study (2006). The authors describe an *information* theme which included the following quote: “very thought provoking and detailed.” They had a separate theme called *feedback/understanding interactions with others* with a sample statement: “Allowed me to better see how others react to my comments and how I present myself to others.” This theme seemed to relate to aspects of the “emotional homework” category in that it prompted increased understanding within the group member. Hogan and colleagues (2006) had a separate theme for *helped with self-awareness* (sample quote: “It gives you an external view of yourself”), which also seemed to relate to what was called “emotional homework” in the present study.

The remarkable similarity between the kinds of comments reported by Hogan and colleagues (2006) and those described presently speaks to the bounded scope of experiences that participants seem to have in response to process observation techniques. Additionally, both studies included positive and negative experiences of group members in relation to receiving process information. Although the present study does not build directly on the work of Hogan and colleagues, it offers an expanded description of experiences that are very similar to those described in their study. It will be useful to continue building on this body of literature given that previous work has not addressed post-processing specifically.

Research implications

This study provided a detailed description of how group therapy members at one university counseling center experienced post-processing. To date, this is the first study to explain the phenomenon of post-processing from the perspective of group members. This study broadens the literature on interpersonal process group counseling by providing a description of a little-known technique and how it is experienced by group members. There are several research and clinical implications from this work.

The findings of the study were discussed in relation to Yalom's therapeutic factors and it was pointed out when participants' experiences seemed to indicate that therapeutic factors may be operating via post-processing (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Next steps in research might include a qualitative study that utilizes a grounded theory approach and attempts to examine the question of how post-processing may foster therapeutic factors in group. It is possible that post-processing may be associated with different therapeutic factors than those described by Yalom. Future research may also be aimed at developing a measure of the ways in which post-processing is experienced. For example, the categories from the present study could be utilized to generate items and then the data could be factor analyzed to determine which types of experiences seem to cluster together.

It is suggested that an important next step would be to develop a set of guidelines for conducting post-processing. Given the emphasis in applied psychology on empirically supported treatments, such guidelines should closely reflect the relevant research and point out areas in which further research is needed. Another interesting

endeavor would be a comparison study in which different methods of post-processing are utilized and rated by group members. For example, it would be interesting to compare how group members experience post-processing depending on whether the content addresses each individual every time, addresses only themes and group-as-a-whole processes, or contains a blend of both. Another useful comparison would be to investigate how the development of cohesion is affected in groups that include post-processing versus those that do not. Of course, comparison group studies pose a number of ethical challenges associated with providing different standards of care and such a study would have to be designed carefully in order to ensure quality therapy for all participants.

Yalom's theory offers lengthy discussion on the tasks of the group leaders and techniques that group leaders may use to shape group culture and facilitate therapeutic factors (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). An entire body of research on post-processing could examine the types of leader comments utilized in post-processing as informed by the interpersonal process theory of group psychotherapy. Studies about various types of leader comments in post-processing might draw on the extensive literature about feedback in group counseling. Factors such as the valence of the comment (e.g., positive or negative) or the intention of the comment (e.g., psychoeducation, interpretation, observation) could be examined in relation to how beneficial group members perceive the comment to be, or the extent to which various types of comments facilitate development of the therapeutic factors.

Another topic that is addressed extensively in the literature on group counseling research and practice is group development. Stages of group development are a core topic for the education of group leaders. Yalom describes the different tasks and goals of group leaders when starting a new group compared to a maintaining a mature group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The present study did not examine group development and was not concerned with assessing the stage each group was in at the time the participant from that group was interviewed. However, several participants did describe a change in the way they experienced post-processing over the course of time they were in group. Future studies should explore how post-processing might be conducted differently over time in order to meet the changing needs of a developing group. For example, post-processing with a new group may be most effective when focused simply on development of cohesion. More mature groups may benefit from post-processing comments in which individual members receive positive and negative feedback about their interpersonal interactions. Further research is needed to understand the relationship between post-processing and group development.

The present work might also be used to generate hypotheses about the relationship between post-processing and various outcomes of group therapy. Qualitative and quantitative studies could seek to describe how different types of post-processing comments relate to group outcomes or individual progress on goals for therapy. Although the present study did not investigate these relationships, the experiences of the participants were consistent with the development of therapeutic factors in group and the progress of the individuals toward their goals. Another idea for an outcome study would

be to examine how post-processing might be related to participants' satisfaction with their group counseling experience. Similarly, it would be interesting to explore how post-processing may be associated with retention or attrition of participants in group therapy.

Cultural factors as they relate to group counseling and to post-processing should also be explored. The participants in the present study belonged to heterogeneous groups with regard to demographics and presenting problems. The cultural context in which these groups were run was that of a counseling center at a large American state university. Social messages about interpersonal relationships and individual responsibility for one's own functioning are inextricably linked to the therapy setting. Inherent to the premise of post-processing is the value that direct feedback is appropriate and useful for personal growth. People from other cultures may not share this value, or may find it counter-therapeutic to receive direct feedback in a group setting without the opportunity to respond. Existing literature on cultural factors in group counseling would be an important resource upon which to draw for designing a study that examines cultural factors in post-processing specifically.

Clinical implications

Clinical implications are tentatively suggested based on the researcher's inferences about how to apply the experiences described in this study to the practice of post-processing. First, the findings suggest that overall, post-processing is a positive and worthwhile component of interpersonal process group psychotherapy. University counseling centers where interpersonal process groups are offered may want to consider

adding a post-processing component to their groups. In agencies where none of the staff have experience with post-processing it would be advantageous to bring in a trained group leader to educate staff on the theory and practice of this technique. It would seem that staff understanding of post-processing and “buy-in” to its purpose is essential in order to practice it effectively. Similarly, the literature suggests that process observation is a useful training tool for new group leaders (Bieschke et al.; Hogan et al.). Agencies that do not currently utilize process observers or post-processing may want to consider adding this component to their group program for training new group therapists.

Second, post-processing may be a vehicle for the development of therapeutic factors in group counseling. The experiences of the participants in the present study were consistent with post-processing being a stimulus for the following therapeutic factors: self-understanding; cohesion; interpersonal learning; instillation of hope; universality; and, imparting information. Group leaders who utilize post-processing may want to consider which therapeutic factors they would like to nurture further and then tailor their post-processing comments accordingly. For example, a group in which the cohesion is still developing may benefit from post-processing comments that highlight connections among members and indications of trust within the group. Similarly, comments geared toward imparting information may be useful for new groups in which the members are acculturating to the group experience.

Third, some negative thoughts and feelings were described and should be taken into consideration by group leaders conducting post-processing. Group leaders may want to decide on a clear format for post-processing (e.g., discuss every group member versus

discuss only themes or group-as-a-whole processes) and make that explicit to group members. Co-leaders may also consider tailoring their post-processing comments to the needs of the group by asking for regular feedback from group members about what aspects of post-processing were helpful and what were not helpful. Several participants in the present study said that during post-processing they have responses to bring back the next week, but they are forgotten or no longer seem important by the time of the next group session. Perhaps a brief comment card made available to participants as they leave post-processing after each session would give them a space to voice their responses. Cards could be kept by group leaders and made available to members at the start of the next session. This may be one way to close the feedback loop of post-processing without re-opening the discussion.

Fourth, the findings suggested that group members preferred the method of post-processing in which the leaders conducted the conversation. It is recommended that group leaders default to the format in which they lead post-processing and members listen silently. Perhaps alternative formats should be introduced with the input of the group, and leaders should seek weekly feedback as to which format the group prefers. For example, some groups may find that member-led post-processing is preferred some weeks; whereas, other weeks they may ask that leaders take charge of the post-processing. It is likely that more advanced, cohesive groups that have reached a productive stage of working together may be more capable of taking on the post-processing component.

Finally, more research is needed before post-processing should be recommended as a standard component of interpersonal process group practice. The complexity and scope of clinical implications associated with group counseling is vast. Additionally, there continues to be a gap between the research and practice of group therapy. The applied nature of the present study makes it particularly informative for practitioners.

Strengths and limitations

Strengths of this study included the in-depth description afforded by qualitative research and the phenomenological approach. This allowed the voices of the participants to be shared so that their individual experiences of post-processing could be heard. Large volumes of data were sorted, clustered, and analyzed through a careful, exhaustive process by the researcher using methods informed by phenomenology. Another strength of the phenomenological methodology of this study was the utilization of several tools to increase trustworthiness. The reflexive journal, the use of auditors, and the practice of member checking all helped to ensure that the data accurately reflected the experiences of the participants.

Personal strengths of the researcher which likely added to the trustworthiness were self-awareness and openness to feedback. Self-awareness and a commitment to ongoing self-examination helped the researcher capitalize on the reflexive journal as a way to bracket assumptions. Openness to feedback and willingness to consider alternative ideas likely helped the researcher approach the work with an open mind to hearing the full range of experiences, positive and negative, described by the participants. At the same time, participants may have made an assumption that the researcher hoped to

find positive results about the impact of post-processing. If participants did make this assumption, it might have affected the way they described their experiences or which aspects of their experiences that they chose to share. For this reason, the researcher emphasized that positive and negative experiences of post-processing were equally valued in order to understand the phenomenon fully from all sides. Similarly, the researcher's stimulus value as a Caucasian female may have influenced the information that participants shared and the way in which the data was interpreted.

The researcher's experiences, thoughts, and feelings were integral to the present work, which may be both a strength and a weakness. The researcher had education, training, and experience in the practice of group psychotherapy and post-processing. This background was an asset in that it increased the researcher's investment in the study and provided a knowledge base from which to draw in order to ensure that the study constituted a relevant and meaningful contribution to the literature on group research and practice. On the other hand, the lens that the researcher brought to the study undoubtedly shaped the understanding and interpretation of the participants' experiences.

A possible criticism of this study could be the limited diversity of the sample. Most participants were White and heterosexual. Experiences may have been different in a sample that included more students of color, international students, or students with disabilities. Also of note, the participants included five graduate students and one returning student who was working on a second Bachelor's degree, making this a particularly well-educated group. Additionally, six participants were working on degrees in social sciences. Perhaps these members volunteered for the study because of their

interests in social sciences and or research. Alternatively, the sample constituted a group who ranged widely in age, number of group sessions attended, and presenting problems. The participants also came from several different counseling groups within the agency. Some diversity was present in the sample with regard to race and sexual orientation. Overall, each of the 12 participants added to the richness and complexity of the findings by sharing their unique experiences.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the experiences of group psychotherapy members in post-processing. The theoretical framework for the study was Yalom's theory of interpersonal process group psychotherapy (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Research methods were guided by a phenomenological approach, with the primary aim to describe and understand how group members experience post-processing. In phenomenological research, there are no guiding hypotheses by the researcher. However, two guiding questions were formulated as suggested by Moustakas (1994) for interpretive phenomenology. The data were organized according to two domains that stemmed from the two guiding interview questions.

The first domain, *Experiences of post-processing*, yielded eight categories that described group members' experiences of post-processing including thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The second domain, *Contextual pieces*, was made up of four themes that described the ways in which experiences of post-processing were affected or influenced from week to week or over time. The categories included a range of positive and negative experiences as part of post-processing. Findings were discussed in the context

of the existing literature as well as in relation to the therapeutic factors described by Yalom (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). This project resulted in several research and clinical implications for the future study and practice of post-processing as part of interpersonal process group psychotherapy. Strengths and limitations of the study were explained, along with suggestions for additional research.

In conclusion, the present study constitutes a valuable addition to the small body of literature on process observer techniques in interpersonal process therapy. This is the first study to examine post-processing from the perspective of group members. The experiences of the 12 participants in this study provide readers with an increased understanding of what post-processing is, and how it is experienced by some group members. This is a preliminary step in beginning to understand more fully the ways in which post-processing may enhance the practice of interpersonal process group psychotherapy in university counseling centers. Finally, this work is a building block for future researchers and practitioners of group psychotherapy.

Table 1

Summary of descriptive information for the sample (N = 12)

Name	Gender	Age	Racial/ethnic identity	Number of sessions attended
Jae	Male	20	Caucasian	12
Vera	Female	25	Caucasian	22
Rebecca	Female	19	Caucasian	20
Dave	Male	18	Caucasian	11
Kathy	Female	21	African American	39
Joy	Female	26	Biracial	90
Claudia	Female	34	Caucasian	19
Teresa	Female	37	Caucasian	59
Jack	Male	28	Caucasian	12
Leticia	Female	23	Caucasian	9
Susan	Female	26	Caucasian	4
Pam	Female	21	Caucasian	8

Table 2

Summary of study results organized by domain, category and theme

A. Domain	EXPERIENCES OF POST-PROCESSING
I. Category	Verbal report card
1. Theme	Growth and progress
2. Theme	Accountability and being “called out”
II. Category	Silent observer phenomenon
3. Theme	Benefits of not being able to respond
4. Theme	Discomfort with being talked about
5. Theme	Mood management
III. Category	Leader expertise
6. Theme	Added value of leader expertise
7. Theme	Unique appreciation for process observer
IV. Category	Emotional homework
V. Category	Light bulb moments
VI. Category	Validation and reinforcement
8. Theme	Validation
9. Theme	Reinforcement
VII. Category	Connections
10. Theme	Connecting the group as a whole
11. Theme	Connecting members to one another

12. Theme	Putting it all together
VIII. Category	Final chapter experiences
13. Theme	Closure
14. Theme	Transition
15. Theme	Reactivation of emotions
16. Theme	Wanting more or unfinished business
B. Domain	CONTEXTUAL PIECES
17. Theme	Intensity or depth
18. Theme	Outside stressors
19. Theme	Group constellation
20. Theme	Time in group

<p><i>Change over time</i></p> <p><i>Difficult not being able to participate during p-p</i></p> <p><i>Different perspectives</i></p>	<p><i>Interviewer:</i> Can you talk more about that experience of having to let it soak in and not responding?</p> <p><i>Rebecca:</i> Yeah, well especially once I got more comfortable in group, I was very verbal, and I was very like, willing to give feedback, and like, trying to be really involved and like an active participant. And so, post-processing, once I got to that point, was almost—felt restraining, you know, like, I want to make comments about this. I want to, like, give feedback about this, you know, like, well I know that you noticed that, but I think this too. And so that was a little bit difficult for me just to try to stay mute during that because a lot of my thoughts were like, you know, my comments to what the leaders thought and stuff like that. But, like I said, just hearing about what the leaders observed, because there are like, you know, multiple leaders in the group, and they observe different things, and like reactions and themes that are brought up, and stuff like that.</p>
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Figure 1. Example of Marginal Notes.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FORM

Participant Recruitment Form

Please indicate whether you are interested in being contacted by the researcher, Karen Muehl, to learn more about participating in the study entitled *Experiences of post-processing in group psychotherapy* (circle yes or no).

Yes No

If yes, please provide your name and preferred method of contact:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

*E-mail: _____

Please note, this is not an agreement to participate. This is to give permission for the researcher to contact you and set up a meeting to discuss participation.

**E-mail is not a secure means of communication.*

Participant Recruitment Form

Please indicate whether you are interested in being contacted by the researcher, Karen Muehl, to learn more about participating in the study entitled *Experiences of post-processing in group psychotherapy* (circle yes or no).

Yes No

If yes, please provide your name and preferred method of contact:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

*E-mail: _____

Please note, this is not an agreement to participate. This is to give permission for the researcher to contact you and set up a meeting to discuss participation.

**E-mail is not a secure means of communication.*

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

TITLE: Experiences of Post-Processing in Group Psychotherapy

VCU IRB NO.: HM11509

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Kathleen M. Ingram, J.D., Ph.D.

This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study staff to explain any words that you do not clearly understand. You may take home an unsigned copy of this consent form to think about or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to find out about how group therapy clients at University Counseling Services (UCS) experience post-processing. Post-processing is the conversation after the group therapy session when the leaders discuss what happened in group. Group members may stay and listen to the post-processing conversation, but are asked to remain silent.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a member of a therapy group at UCS and you have been to three or more post-processing sessions.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to be in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form after you have had all your questions answered and you understand what will happen.

In this study you will participate in an interview that will last about an hour and a half (90 minutes). The interview will be held at UCS in one of the group therapy rooms. During this interview you will meet with one interviewer and you will be asked about what post-processing is like for you. There are no right or wrong answers.

The interview will be recorded so we can be sure to get everything you say, but no names will be used. If your name is recorded by accident, we will remove it (and any other information that could give away who you are) when the interview is typed up.

In this study, we would also like to get the following information about you: age, gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, college major, number of group sessions attended, and the reason you first decided to seek counseling services. This information is in your UCS file and will be given to the researcher by a UCS staff member. The researcher will not have access to your file and will not be given any other information aside from the items listed.

The interviewer will also ask permission to contact you by telephone or mail to ask you some follow-up questions. That follow-up will take place from 1-3 months after your interview.

If we learn new information during the course of the research which may affect your willingness to continue participating in the study, we will provide it to you.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Sometimes talking about personal subjects causes people to become upset. Several questions may be asked about your thoughts and feelings about post-processing, and how post-processing affects you, and what it means to you. You do not have to talk about anything you do not want to talk about, and you may stop the interview and leave at any time. If you become upset, the interviewer will encourage you to contact your UCS therapist so you can get help in dealing with these issues.

BENEFITS TO YOU AND OTHERS

You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but the information we learn from people in this study may help us better understand what it is like to experience post-processing as a group member. This information may be useful in planning future research and/or may affect the use of post-processing at counseling centers.

COSTS

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend in the interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of audio recordings of the interviews, transcripts of the interviews, and background information provided to the investigator by UCS staff (your age, gender, race/ethnicity, year in college, college major, number of group sessions attended, and the reason you first decided to seek counseling services). The information is being collected only for research purposes. Your data will be identified by ID numbers and pseudonyms (fictional names) and will be stored in a locked research area.

All personal identifying information (name, phone number and/or e-mail address, and background information), will be kept in password-protected electronic files and these files will be deleted after the study has been completed.

Interviews will be audio recorded using a digital recording device. Recordings will be uploaded and saved as password-protected electronic files and the deleted from the original recording device. Electronic audio files will be deleted within 1 year.

Interviews will be transcribed (typed up) and de-identified (information that could identify you will be removed). De-identified transcripts will be kept indefinitely by the researcher.

Information from the study and information from the consent form signed by you may be looked at or copied for research or legal purposes by Virginia Commonwealth University.

What we find from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers.

Study staff will not tell anyone the answers you give us; however, if you say that you are intending to hurt yourself or someone else, the interviewer is required to report this information to the authorities. Also, if you talk about a child or elderly person who is being abused, the interviewer is required to report this to the authorities.

IF AN INJURY HAPPENS

Virginia Commonwealth University and the VCU Health System (also known as MCV Hospital) do not have a plan to give long-term care or money if you are injured because you are in the study. If you are injured because of being in this study, tell the study staff right away. The study staff will arrange for short-term emergency care or referral if it is needed. Bills for treatment may be sent to you or your insurance. Your insurance may or may not pay for taking care of injuries that happen because of being in this study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You do not have to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without any penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked

in the study. Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the study staff without your consent. The reasons might include:

- the study staff thinks it necessary for your health or safety;
- you have not followed study instructions;
- the investigator has stopped the study; or
- administrative reasons require your withdrawal.

QUESTIONS

In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:

Karen Muehl, M.S.
Virginia Commonwealth University
612 N. Lombardy, Room 203
P.O. Box 842018
Richmond, VA 23284-2018
Ph: (804) 928-2483

or Kathleen Ingram, J.D., Ph.D.
Virginia Commonwealth University
806 W. Franklin Street, Room 203
P.O. Box 842018
Richmond, VA 23284-2018
Ph: (804) 828-6346

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Office for Research
Virginia Commonwealth University
800 East Leigh Street, Suite 113
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, VA 23298
Telephone: 804-827-2157

You may also contact this number for general questions, concerns or complaints about the research. Please call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else. Additional information about participation in research studies can be found at <http://www.research.vcu.edu/irb/volunteers.htm>.

CONSENT

I have been given the chance to read this consent form. I understand the information about this study. Questions that I wanted to ask about the study have been answered. My signature says that I am willing to participate in this study. I will receive a copy of the consent form once I have agreed to participate.

Participant name printed

Participant signature

Date

Name of Person Conducting Informed Consent
Discussion / Witness (Printed)

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Consent
Discussion / Witness

Date

Investigator Signature (if different from above)

Date

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

Demographic and background questions

1. *What was your experience with therapy prior to this? With group therapy?*
2. *Could you briefly describe what you are working on in group?*

Interview questions

1. *How would you describe your experience of post-processing?*
 - a. *What are your thoughts related to post-processing?*
 - i. *in general? When interacting with other people?*
 - ii. *during group?*
 - iii. *during post-processing?*
 - b. *What are your feelings related to post-processing?*
 - i. *in general? When interacting with other people?*
 - ii. *during group?*
 - iii. *during post-processing?*
 - c. *How does post-processing affect your behavior?*
 - i. *in general? When interacting with other people?*
 - ii. *during group?*
 - iii. *during post-processing?*
 - d. *Any physical reactions or sensations associated with post-processing?*
 - i. *during post-processing?*
2. *What has influenced or affected your experience of post-processing?*

To clarify, if this is confusing: *Sometimes people experience post-processing differently from week to week. If this is true for you, any ideas about what might influence the experience?*

 - a. *How has your experience of post-processing changed over time?*
 - b. *How are you affected by the process observer?*
3. *How has your experience in post-processing affected [your progress on] what you are working on in group?*
4. “Grand Tour” question: e.g., *Is there anything else that comes to mind, that we might not have talked about?*

Possible alternative/additional questions:

- *How might your experience be different, if at all, without the process observer?*
 - o *In group? In post-processing?*

Vita

Karen A. Muehl was born on July 16, 1978 in Cooperstown, New York where she and her sister were raised by their parents, Douglas and Patricia Muehl. Karen received her Bachelor of Arts in May, 2000 from Boston College where she graduated summa cum laude with a major in psychology and a minor in Spanish language and literatures. After college she was a research assistant in the pediatric psychopharmacology unit at Massachusetts General Hospital. Karen entered the counseling psychology doctoral program at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2003. She received her Master of Science degree in counseling psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2006. In 2007, Karen received the University Leadership Award from Virginia Commonwealth University. In 2008, she won the John G. Corazzini Award for Therapeutic Group Work. Karen will complete her predoctoral internship at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Counseling Center in August, 2009. Her Doctor of Philosophy in counseling psychology is expected in August, 2009.