

**Assignment 5.1: Reflection Paper on The Schopenhauer Cure**

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The Schopenhauer Cure is a story of triumph that chronicles the transformative path of a therapy group in the last year of its leader's life. The members of the group journeyed together through the stages of development and along the way the members experience many healing therapeutic factors. The leader, Julius, employed a democratic style of leadership but also maintained structure and used several leadership techniques repeatedly to help focus the group. The book is a masterful example of group therapy and has inspired me to become a group therapist.

One technique that Julius used several times was distinguishing and switching between content and process. We heard mention of these terms throughout the group and members such as Tony even used it themselves (Gladding, 2020). Another technique Julius used was asking the 'why now' question and refocusing the group to the here and now (Yalom, 2005).

In chapter 13 we got an overview of some of the structural elements of the group including that it was open ended and had been going on for decades. Julius said that while none of the original group members remained, there was a culture that persisted in the group that had been there since the beginning and that there was an optimistic and hopeful tone in the group that continued to this day. There was also a mention of unspoken group norms or rules that no group member could recite in detail but each member understood. Julius also said there was an understanding of what is appropriate or inappropriate in the group that seems to be passed down from one generation of the group to the next (Yalom, 2005).

This challenged my assumptions about the group process as I had been under the impression that group culture was much more assigned or prescribed by the leader rather than

passed down from veteran members to new ones. We saw this throughout the book where a member such as Tony (the standard bearer for the group's culture) would course correct a member by organically reacting when they said or did something inappropriate. For example, Tony did this several times with Philip soon after Philip's arrival regarding Philip's inappropriate interpersonal communication which lacked eye contact and other basic group norms.

Of course, it made sense that members of the group would transition such knowledge between each other as several of the therapeutic factors we have learned about require just such a member interaction. But reading about the details of it at work and in such a lively way was still eye opening for me. It was almost as if the culture of the group and its therapeutic factors were naturally infused into new group members like people developing immunities through some automated vaccination process. This whole concept has really gotten me much more excited about becoming a group therapist.

Regarding group stages, the group clearly progressed through Tuckman and Jensen's five-stage model of development. The formative stage began with Philip's entrance into the group (Gladding, 2020). And soon after upon Pam's return in chapter 21, the group entered a tumultuous storming phase. Struggles for informational, influential and authoritative power ensued (Gladding, 2020). The group gradually moved into the normative phase and in the final six months of the group it moved into performing. Even Philip seemed to acknowledge the performing stage when Julius offered to fulfill his contract and begin supervision after six months but Philip said he wanted to complete the full year given how good it was going. The interpersonal bonding that thrived in this performing stage culminated with the final session that memorialized Julius, honored and adjourned the group. Three years later there was a

heartwarming scene with Pam supportively encouraging Philip and Tony right before their first session as co leaders of a new therapy group.

Regarding therapeutic factors, there were so many present throughout the group. Catharsis seemed almost ever present beginning with Bonnie sharing in chapter 17 about her insecurity about her appearance (Gladding, 2020). Rebecca certainly seemed to experience catharsis when she shared in chapter 23 about her prostitution one weekend in Vegas. Stewart also shared about a sexual encounter that same session in chapter 23. Gil experienced a breakthrough and catharsis when he revealed his alcoholism in chapter 26. In chapter 29, Julius shared how his sexuality surged following his wife's death and how he slept with several women comforting him including one of his wife's relatives. And perhaps the most powerful example of catharsis was in chapter 40 when Philip revealed that he perceived himself as a monster that nobody could love and then sobbed in response to Pam telling him that she could have loved him (Yalom, 2005).

Another therapeutic factor that was clearly present was instillation of hope which naturally resulted from Julius' life affirming world view (in direct contrast to Philip's pessimistic view based on Shopenhauer) (Gladding, 2020). In Chapter 13 Julius lays out his view that he wants to spend his last healthy year living his life as he has lived it, as a therapist, and that the therapy will likely be even more productive for everyone given everyone's awareness of the group's termination. Julius reinforces the instillation of hope for Gil and the whole group when he encourages Gil about his ability to make a change with his drinking in chapter 26. And at several points he builds on the instillation of hope when he implies that Philip will communicate in a more personal way when he is ready (Yalom, 2005). There were several other therapeutic

factors present such as imparting of information, universality and interpersonal learning (Gladding, 2020).

Regarding ethical issues, I noticed one important ethical issue that came up in the group. Several times following Philip's entrance into the group, Julius was challenged by the ethical issue of nonmaleficence (Gladding, 2020). Julius was so bothered by Philip's behavior that he was tempted to direct the group in such a way that would have been hurtful to Philip. However, true to form, Julius' will to help every member of the group prevailed over his frustration with Philip and he successfully navigated this ethical issue each time. I think this example of an ethical issue is a very important lesson. Undoubtedly, I will encounter group members whose interactions with other members bother me and it will be important to be self aware of such frustration such that I can avoid succumbing to it and in any way fall short of my ethical obligations to these members (Yalom, 2005).

## References

Gladding, S. T. (2020). *Groups: A counseling specialty*. Pearson.

Yalom, I. D. (2005). *The schopenhauer cure: A novel*. Harper Perennial.