



The Power of Group Work

Working with Latina Survivors of Sexual Abuse from a Social Constructionist Perspective

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Objectives

- Discuss the foundations of group work with survivors
- Provide an overview of social constructionist therapeutic approaches and interventions
- Review of relevant cultural considerations
- Illustrate how these approaches, interventions, and considerations have been applied in our group work with Spanish speaking Latina survivors of sexual abuse.

Rape Crisis Center 2010 Report:

- Approximately 60% of clients are Latinos
- Nearly 20% of Latino clients are Spanish Speakers

Why Working with Latinas?

- 1 in 6 Latinas reported sexual victimization.
- 10% of sexual victims utilized social services but only 3.3 % sought services to deal with the abuse
- About 58% of victims sought informal help from family, friends, neighbors, clergy, etc.
- 37% did not report due to shame.

(Cuevas and Sabina, 2010)

Why Group Work?

- Identification and commonalities with other participants: Witnessing others discussing their stories of abuse and struggles, exploring their expectations of themselves and the realities of such challenging situations can invite more realistic perspectives and possibilities on the situation.
- Acknowledgment and breaking of unhealthy secrets: The simple act of validation or noticing a large number of actions taken to stop the abuse can elicit significantly more self-appreciation and empowerment.
- Safe place for grieving. The group process provided opportunities to react, question, and explore each others' stories on recovery.

Why Group Work? Cont'

- Exploration of emotions, beliefs, and behaviors. Concentrating on positive actions rather than static aspects of a survivor may set a more effective tone for change. “Recreating a life story that goes beyond recovery from childhood sexual abuse may assist an adult survivor to consider a future full of possibilities” (Anderson and Hiersteiner, 2008).
- Safe context for challenging beliefs. Group experiences provide interaction with resilient individuals that may help those participants who are stuck in their problem to consider new or different alternatives or meaning to their problems.
- Create a support network. Important factors to recovery included disclosing the abuse, making meaning of the trauma experienced, and developing supportive relationships

Why a Social Constructionist Perspective?

“The essential feature of social constructionism is the notion that our reality construction is the result of meaning making activities that take place in our relationships with other people and our cultural/environmental/linguistic contexts.”

(Bobele, 2008)

Social Constructionism

Distinguishing Ideas

- Reality is constructed through our interactions with others and our experiences.
- There is no absolute truth. There are many ways of knowing and understanding the world
- Takes a not knowing position with curiosity about how clients make sense of their experiences
- Multiple perspectives are accepted
- Participants' and therapists' realities and expertise are respected, recognized, and utilized.
- Postmodern Therapies: Narrative and Solution Focused

Postmodern Therapies: Guiding Assumptions for Group

- Collaborative and conversational: Participants and Therapists search for understanding the problem, its significance, and solution as defined by the participants.
- Respectful: takes into consideration participants' language, class, education, culture, values, beliefs, history, and experiences with the understanding of how they shape our views about reality.
- Concentrate on the positive aspects, on the solution rather than the problem, and the participants' strengths.
- Emphasis on women's resiliency and resources.

Therapists Role

- The therapists attempt to understand the participants' story as it is perceived by the participants and how it affects their lives, utilizing the participants' language.
- The therapists work with the participants to explore various experiences of self and to distinguish which of those selves they prefer in which contexts. The therapists then works to assist the participants in living out narratives that support the growth and development of these preferred selves.
- The therapists utilize the participants' recognized skills, knowledge, and resources in determining how to guide the participants. These skills, knowledge, and resources are then extended to hypothesize how they can assist the participants in the future.

Narrative

- Distinguishing ideas
- Interventions
 - Externalization
 - Deconstructing
 - Unique Outcomes
 - Re-authoring
- Examples

Solution Focused

- Distinguishing Ideas
- Interventions
 - Pre-session change
 - Clear and concrete goals
 - Scaling questions
 - Miracle questions
 - Exceptions
- Examples

Linguistic and Cultural Considerations

- Honored participants' culture, values, and beliefs
- The use of participants' language
- The use of sayings' and metaphors
- Sensitive to participants' needs (childcare, transportation, special accommodations)
- Flexible schedule

Cultural Considerations

- Personalismo
- Simpatía
- Respect
- Familismo
- Religion/Spirituality
- Clear demarcation of gender roles
- Risk of revictimization

Cultural Challenges

- Oppression
- Submissiveness
- Machismo
- Marianismo
- Fatalismo
- Guilt
- Ageism

The Group: *Construyendo Caminos de Esperanza*

- Resources: Finding the materials in Spanish and translating materials
- Screening interviews: Inclusion/Exclusion
- Instruments: Trauma Symptom Inventory, Outcome Rating Scale (ORS), Session Rating Scale (SRS)
- Facilitators: two counselors who identified themselves as Latinas
- Group Characteristics
- Themes addressed

Findings

Trauma Symptom Inventory

Outcome Rating Scale (ORS)

Session Rating Scale (SRS)

Lessons Learned

- Having more time for clients to share their own healing tools (poetry, prayers, songs, art supplies)
- Women expressed a need to continue being engaged in group work and maybe even helping others in their process
- Vocabulary in lectures and materials
- The need for Spanish speaking mental health professionals
- Resiliency
- From English to Spanish to English...

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Questions?

“Construyendo de Esperanza”