

Is It the Unexpected Experience That Keeps Them Coming Back? Group Climate and Session Attendance Examined Between Groups, Between Members, and Between Sessions

Dennis M. Kivlighan, Jr.
University of Maryland

Jill Denise Paquin
Chatham University

Yu-Kuang Kevin Hsu
National Hsinchu University of Education

Attending group therapy sessions is necessary for a group member to have a chance at receiving benefit from the intervention. Group members' perceptions of their group's climate has been linked with important group member outcomes, including session attendance. On the basis of the writings of Curran and Bauer (2011), the current study examined group members' longitudinal ratings of session engagement and decomposed them into between-groups, between-members, and between-sessions components. These components were then used to examine the relationship between group members' ratings of an engaged group climate in the previous session and their attendance the following session. Session attendance in 573 group sessions for 91 group members in 14 Taiwanese counseling groups was modeled in a 3-level hierarchical model (sessions within group members, within groups). Contrary to our hypotheses, between-groups, between-members, and between-sessions components of engagement were not related to session attendance. However, there was a significant interaction between the between-members and between-sessions components of session engagement and group size in predicting session attendance. The likelihood of attendance increased when group members who, on average, rated sessions as being low in engagement uncharacteristically rated a previous session as high in engagement. The likelihood of attendance also increased when group members who, on average, rated sessions as high in engagement uncharacteristically rated the previous session as low in engagement. Larger group sizes amplified these effects. Expectancy (dis)confirmation theory is used to explain these results. Theoretical, research, and clinical implications are discussed.

Keywords: attendance, group climate, longitudinal models, variance partitioning

Attendance is important in all types of groups. In the group therapy setting, Yalom and Leszcz (2005) said that, "A member who has a poor attendance record (for whatever reason) is unlikely to benefit from the group" (p. 327). From a dose–response perspective, it is easy to see why poor attendance would be detrimental, particularly in closed groups (groups in which new members are not added after the first or early sessions). Group members who attend fewer sessions have a lower dose of the treatment than do group members who attend a greater number of sessions, and therefore likely to benefit less than members who attend regularly. Furthermore, infrequent attendance can contribute to an "absence

culture" and can affect the attendance of the other group members (Gellatly & Luchak, 1998).

Surprisingly, there is little research on the effect of member attendance in counseling, therapy, or growth groups. In an early study of therapy groups, Stone, Blase, and Bozzuto (1980) found that low attendance in early group sessions was related to later group member dropout. In the more recent research on attendance in groups, researchers examined the effects of group members' attendance in structured groups. For example, Nix, Bierman, McMahon, and the Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group (2009) found that poorer attendance was related to poorer outcomes in parenting support groups. Similarly, in exercise groups, better group member attendance was related to better health outcomes (e.g., Baker et al., 2007). There has, however, been an extensive examination of the impact of attendance in university classes. A meta-analysis of a large number of studies (90 independent samples and data from 28,034 students) revealed that attendance was positively related to both class grades and overall college grade-point average (Credé, Roch, & Kieszczynka, 2010). Because group member attendance is theoretically and empirically important, theorists and researchers have developed models for predicting attendance. In these models, researchers have examined

Dennis M. Kivlighan, Jr., Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education, University of Maryland; Jill Denise Paquin, Graduate Programs in Counseling Psychology, Chatham University; Yu-Kuang Kevin Hsu, Department of Educational Psychology & Counseling, National Hsinchu University of Education.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Yu-Kuang Kevin Hsu, Department of Educational Psychology & Counseling, National Hsinchu University of Education, Taiwan. E-mail: kevin@mail.nhcue.edu.tw

between-person, between-group, and between-session predictors of attendance.

Between-Group Predictors of Attendance

“Attendance norms” are the most studied between-group predictor of group member attendance. They are considered between-group predictors because “norms” of any sort are an inherently group-level phenomenon. Therefore, to determine attendance norms, one must ask: What are the particular norms surrounding attendance in this particular group? Gellatly and Luchak (1998) defined attendance norms as the attendance-related “beliefs, values and behavioral patterns that are shared among members of a work group or organizational unit” (p. 1086). Typically, attendance norms are operationalized as the prior attendance of the members of the group. In the industrial-organizational literature, group norms surrounding attendance are consistently associated with individual attendance (Rentsch & Steel, 2003).

Only one group counseling study examined attendance norms, operationalized as the aggregated previous attendance of the other group members (excluding the target group member) to predict that individual group member’s attendance. Specifically, Kivlighan, Kivlighan, and Cole (2012) found that the higher levels of attendance by the other group members, in a prior session, were associated with a higher probability of a group member attending the next group session. Additionally, attendance norms are not the only group-level process that can affect a group member’s attendance. For example, Paquin, Miles, and Kivlighan (2011) found that a greater number of in-session intimate behaviors (e.g., “Talks about own feelings and behavior”), aggregated across the other group members in a previous group session, increased the probability that an individual group member would attend the following session.

The Kivlighan et al. (2012) and Paquin et al. (2011) studies suggest that between-group processes can affect a group member’s session attendance. Building on these two studies, we examined between-group perceptions of group engagement as a predictor of group member attendance. Specifically, we hypothesized that people in groups with higher levels of between-group engagement compared with groups with lower levels of between-group engagement would be more likely to attend the next session.

Between-group variables can only account for a portion of the variance in group member behaviors, including attendance. Therefore, in the current study, we also examine between-member predictors of group member attendance. These between-member variables are described below.

Between-Member Predictors of Attendance

Early theorists and researchers saw attendance as a characteristic of the group member; therefore, they looked for personality correlates of attendance. In group therapy/counseling settings, researchers examined individual diagnoses and personality as predictors of attendance (reviewed in Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). For example, in their study, Ilardi and Kaslow (2009) found that lower attendance was related to a fearful attachment style and interpersonal hassles among the 51 African American women who participated in empowerment group psychotherapy. In one of the largest and most comprehensive studies of attendance, MacNair-Semands

(2002) used the Group Therapy Questionnaire (MacNair & Corazzini, 1994) to assess client characteristics believed to be related to attendance. Using 310 group therapy clients, group member anger/hostility and social inhibition predicted lower attendance. However, MacNair-Semands was only able to correctly predict whether a group member was in the high- or low-attendance cluster 58.4% of the time.

The research summarized above has conceptualized between-group member predictors of attendance as traitlike variables (e.g., personality traits). It is possible, however, to examine more state-like between-group member variables. An important state variable is the group member’s perception of the group’s cohesion or group climate. Ogrodniczuk, Piper, and Joyce (2006) examined group members’ sense of belonging to their group as a predictor of session attendance in supportive group therapy for individuals with personality disorders. They found that a group member’s sense of belongingness to the group was related to her or his session attendance. Specifically, and perhaps unsurprisingly, a lower sense of belonging was related to less frequent group attendance. In a related study examining group dropout, which is highly correlated with attendance, McCallum, Piper, Ogrodniczuk, and Joyce (2002) found that group dropouts reported less positive feelings in early group sessions than other group members. These studies are important because they suggest that a group member’s general perceptions of the group are an important between-member predictor of attendance.

In the current study, we examined group members’ perceptions of an engaged group climate (MacKenzie, 1983) as a between-member predictor of attendance. We examined group members’ perceptions of an engaged group climate because group climate is the most robust area of group counseling research (McClendon & Burlingame, 2010); the most widely used measure of group climate is the Group Climate Questionnaire (GCQ; MacKenzie, 1983). The GCQ describes the climate of a group along the dimensions of engagement (self-disclosure; cohesion and work orientation), avoidance (relying on the leader or other group members to avoid responsibility for change), and conflict (interpersonal conflict and lack of trust) (McClendon & Burlingame, 2010). Given that perceptions of group engagement are moderately to strongly *positively* correlated with group member outcome and other important group processes (McClendon & Burlingame, 2010), we chose to examine the relationship between engagement and attendance. We hypothesized that group members who saw the group as generally more engaged would have a greater probability of attending subsequent sessions.

In order to determine what predicts session attendance, it is also important to examine processes operating at the level of each therapy session. These between-session processes are discussed below.

Between-Session Predictors of Attendance

Paquin et al. (2011) were the first to examine attendance at the session level. In their study, if a group member was an outlier in the previous session (had either the highest or lowest number of intimate behaviors), then that group member was less likely to attend the following session. Kivlighan et al. (2012) also examined attendance at the session level. They found that a group member’s

cumulative history of attendance was an important predictor of that member's probability of attending the next session.

Both Paquin et al. (2011) and Kivlighan et al. (2012) examined behaviors as predictors of group member attendance. It is likely, however, that a group member's perceptions of a previous session will also affect her or his probability of attending the next session. As noted above, a member's perception of her or his group's level of engagement in a session is an important area for investigation (Ogrodniczuk et al., 2006). Therefore, we hypothesized that when group members rated the previous session as more engaged, relative to other sessions, they have a higher probability of attending the next group session.

Identifying Between-Session, Between-Member, and Between-Group Effects

When perceptions of the group's engaged climate and session attendance are measured longitudinally, it is possible to separate these perceptions of engagement into between-group, between-member, and between-session components. As shown by Curran and Bauer (2011), separating the between-member and between-session components is done by obtaining each individual group member's session-by-session deviation in engaged perceptions from a between-session constant. When a group member's perceptions of engagement are changing linearly across time, each group member's session engagement rating is expressed as a deviation of their session engagement rating (the residual) from the linear line of best fit for engagement regressed on time for that group member. Specifically, the researcher, separately, regresses each group member's engaged ratings on the mean-centered session number for each individual group member. The individual error terms (residuals) from these regressions are used as Level 1, between-session predictors of group member attendance, and the individual intercepts from each of the regressions can be used as Level 2, between-member predictors of group member session attendance in a two-level, multilevel model (see Curran & Bauer, 2011).

It is also possible, however, to decompose the intercepts described above into between-members and between-groups components. This is done by expressing each group member's intercept as a deviation from the aggregated engagement score for her or his group. These deviation scores are the scores used as Level 2, between-member predictors of group member attendance, and aggregated group engagement scores are used as Level 3, between-groups predictors of group member session attendance in a three-level, multilevel model.

As seen above, we have made predictions for how between-group, between-member, and between-session components of a perceived engaged climate will be related to group member session attendance. It is likely, however, that these different levels of the perceived engaged climate will interact to predict group member session attendance. For example, for a group member who generally sees her or his group sessions as highly engaged, a decrease in a particular session's engaged climate may be more impactful on whether she attends subsequent sessions than would a decrease in a particular session's engaged climate for a group member who generally sees her group's climate during sessions as being less engaged. However, there is not enough theory or research to make specific hypotheses about particular cross-level interactions. Therefore, we examined these cross-level interactions without

making specific hypotheses. Furthermore, because the counseling groups in the current study varied in size and because group size is related to many group dynamics (e.g., Shaw, 1981), we also examined how group size affects session attendance.

Group Size

Some research shows that larger groups are more productive (e.g., Laughlin, Hatch, Silver, & Boh, 2006); however, other research shows that in larger groups, group members are more dissatisfied and experience more negative affect (Shaw, 1981). Examining counseling groups, Shechtman and Dvir (2006) found that members made fewer "simple self-disclosures" in large groups; however, intimate self-disclosures, resistance, unproductive behaviors, productive behaviors, positive responses, and negative responses were all unrelated to group size.

It is likely that group size is related to some group processes and outcomes and that group size is often a function of the type of group. For example, Yalom and Leszcz, (2005) said that the ideal size for an interactional group is between seven and 12 members. The rationale is that groups that have fewer than seven members lack diversity in reactions that are essential for effective group functioning. Groups that have more than 12 members are more likely to have participation problems (either members participating too much or too little). Because the groups in the current study ranged in size from five to nine members, it is likely that the groups varied from being "too small" to more ideal in size. Therefore, we hypothesized that as group size increases, attendance levels will also increase.

Method

Groups

The groups examined in this study are the same groups used in Hsu, Paquin, and Kivlighan (2013). The prior study's focus on reasons for self-disclosing and attendance was not examined. The orientation of the counseling groups in this study were semi-structured and based on the interpersonal process approach (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005), which encouraged members to listen, support, solve problems, practice new behaviors in and outside of group, and exchange feedback with one another. In the initial stage, the group leaders used structured activities to help the members "warm up," build norms, and facilitate member sharing and interacting designed to foster participants' involvement and group cohesion. In later stages, the group format shifted to focusing on problem solving and interpersonal learning through the provision of interpersonal feedback.

These 14 counseling groups were conducted on a university campus in Taiwan. Groups were composed of university students and participants from the community. Groups ranged in size from five to nine members ($M = 6.86$, $SD = 1.29$). The groups met for ten, 90-min weekly sessions. Ten of these groups were coled by two trainees, and four groups were led by a single leader. Assignment to a particular group was based on participants' scheduling availability. After the first session, attendance rate for these 14 groups was 77.57% across sessions.

Participants

Group leaders. Twenty-three graduate students, 19 women and four men, ranging in age from 24 to 48 years old, in a counseling program either enrolled in a group practicum course or facilitated the groups on their master's-level internship. The practicum students (leading 11 of the 14 groups) participated in a 6-week intensive group counseling course. The students on internship (leading three of the 14 groups) participated in a 10-hr group counseling workshop.

Group members. Ninety-six Taiwanese participants, 71 women (74%) and 25 men (26%), ranging in age from 16 to 52 years old ($M = 28.77$, $SD = 9.44$), were assigned to groups. Of these participants, 49 were individuals from the community at large (51%) and 47 were current undergraduates (49%). Highest level of education attained for most group members was some college or above ($n = 81$, 84.4%). Six group members had completed high school ($n = 6$, 6.3%), six group members had completed middle school ($n = 6$, 6.3%), one had completed elementary school ($n = 1$, 1%), and educational attainment data are unknown for two members.

Measures

The GCQ-Short form (GCQ-S). A Chinese version of the GCQ-S (MacKenzie, 1983), translated and updated by Taiwan scholars (Wang & Lin, 2000), was used to measure group members' perceptions of the group climate in this study. The GCQ-S comprises 12 items on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). Although the GCQ-S is composed of three scales—Engagement, Avoidance and Conflict—for the purposes of the current study, we examined the Engaged scale only. The construct validity of GCQ-S has been tested extensively, and research has demonstrated links between the GCQ-S scales and both group processes and group member outcomes (McClendon & Burlingame, 2010). The factor structure of the GCQ-S was confirmed using confirmatory factors analysis (CFA) in a recent study (Wang, Chen, Wang, & Lin, 2012). Coefficient alphas in Wang et al. (2012) were .67 for Engagement, .31 for Avoidance, and .61 for Conflict, which is based on a sample of 744 participants, in 82 groups. Only the Engagement scale was examined in the current study, and the coefficient alphas across all members and sessions was .71.

Procedure

Potential group members were invited through the electronic solicitations in several university and community forums in the Hsinchu area of Taiwan. The groups were advertised as an intervention aimed at helping potential group members with problem solving regarding interpersonal relationships (family, friends, and romantic relationships), adjustment issues, and career exploration. Group leaders met with group members for a screening interview to provide information, answer questions, clarify the group process and related expectations, and to determine goodness of fit between the group and the participant. In general, members were deemed appropriate for the group if their levels of symptoms and functioning were consistent with nonclinical populations and their stated goals for therapy were consistent with the stated goals of the group intervention. Potential group members were excluded from the groups if they met criteria for severe depression or anxiety, en-

dorsed psychotic symptoms, or displayed traits consistent with a personality disorder. No group members screened during these interviews were excluded from participation in the groups; some group members declined participation after the screening interview. Informed consent was obtained from all group leaders and group members. Group leaders met weekly with the supervisor for group supervision. The counseling groups met once a week, for 90 min each session, for 10 sessions. The GCQ-S was completed immediately after sessions two through 10.

Results

We used an empty model to determine the variance in attendance that was between sessions, between group members and between groups. Because the outcome variable was dichotomous (0 = absent, 1 = present), a Bernoulli distribution was used. Eighty-five percent of the variance in attendance (present or absent) was at the session level (between sessions). Differences between group members (between member) accounted for 12% of the variance in attendance, and 3% of the variance in attendance was attributable to groups (between groups). The gamma coefficient for the intercept from the empty model was significant, $\gamma_{000}(13) = 1.44$, $SE = 0.14$, $t = 10.97$, $p < .001$, meaning that the probability of a member being present was significantly different from zero. Exponentiating this gamma indicated that the average attendance rate for group members (the probability that a member would attend the next session) was .82.

Our main analysis used a three-level hierarchical linear model: The between-session engaged rating from the previous session was a Level 1 (session-level) predictor, the between-member engaged rating was a Level 2 (member-level) predictor, and the between-group engaged rating and the group's size were the Level 3 (group-level) predictors of current session attendance. As in the empty model, a Bernoulli distribution was used.

The specific model examined was:

Level 1 Model:

$$\text{prob}(ATTEND_{ijk} = 1 | \pi_{jk}) = \phi_{ijk}.$$

$$\log[\phi_{ijk}/(1 - \phi_{ijk})] = \eta_{ijk}.$$

$$\eta_{ijk} = \pi_{0jk} + \pi_{1jk}^*(\text{between-session engagement}_{jk}).$$

Level 2 Model:

$$\pi_{0jk} = \beta_{00k} + \beta_{01k}^*(\text{between-member engagement}_{jk}) + r_{0jk}.$$

$$\pi_{1jk} = \beta_{10k} + \beta_{11k}^*(\text{between-member engagement}_{jk}) + r_{1jk}.$$

Level 3 Model:

$$\beta_{00k} = \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001}(\text{between-group engagement}_k) + \gamma_{002}(\text{group size}_k) + u_{00k}.$$

$$\beta_{01k} = \gamma_{010} + \gamma_{011}(\text{between-group engagement}_k) + \gamma_{012}(\text{group size}_k) + u_{01k}.$$

$$\beta_{10k} = \gamma_{100} + \gamma_{101}(\text{between-group engagement}_k) + \gamma_{102}(\text{group size}_k) + u_{10k}.$$

$$\beta_{11k} = \gamma_{110} + \gamma_{111}(\text{between-group engagement}_k) \\ + \gamma_{112}(\text{group size}_k) + u_{11k}.$$

Both the between-session engagement and between-member engagement scores were group centered, and the between-group engagement scores were grand-mean centered.

The final estimation of fixed effects, using the population-average model, is reported in Table 1. In this final hierarchical linear model, the intercept was significant ($\gamma_{000} = 1.49$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = 13.26$, $p < .000$), meaning that the attendance rate was significantly different from zero. The probability of attendance for a group member with an average level of between-session engaged, an average level of between-member engaged, and an average level of between-group engaged in an average sized group was .82. None of our hypotheses were supported. Specifically, the slope for between-session engaged was not significant ($\gamma_{100} = -0.09$, $SE = 0.25$, $t = -0.35$, $p = .74$). Also, between-member engaged was not related to session attendance ($\gamma_{010} = 0.01$, $SE = 0.11$, $t = 0.11$, $p = .93$). Finally, between-group engaged was also not related to session attendance ($\gamma_{001} = 0.22$, $SE = 0.30$, $t = 0.74$, $p = .48$). There was, however, a significant three-way interaction that involved between-session engaged ratings, between-member engaged ratings, and group size ($\gamma_{112} = -0.61$, $SE = 0.17$, $t = -3.53$, $p = .005$). The odds ratio for the interaction term is .54. Therefore, the interaction reduces the odds of attendance by 46%. The interaction effect is illustrated in Figure 1.

In examining Figure 1, it is important to note that the slopes are not significantly different (t value for slope difference = -1.06 , $p = .37$) between the line representing a high level of between-member engaged and a large group size and the line representing a high level of between-member engaged and a small group size. Therefore, regardless of group size, when group members who typically rate their group as more engaged (compared with the other members of their group) and rate their previous session as more engaged than their typical session rating, this group member is less likely to attend the following session. Conversely, when group members who typically rate their group as more engaged (compared with the other members of their group) rate their previous session as less engaged than what they typically rate their group sessions, this group member is more likely to attend the following session. In examining Figure 1, it is important to note

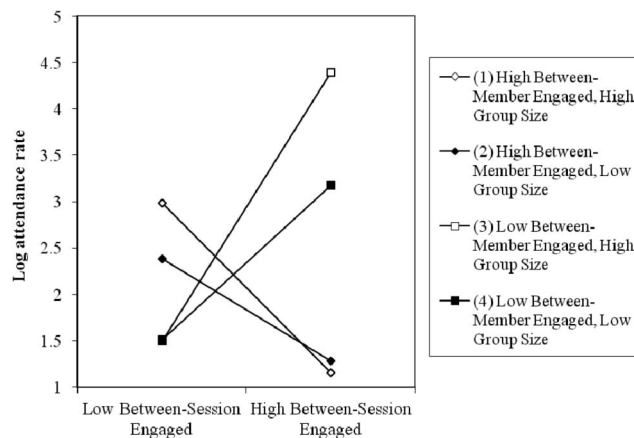


Figure 1. Interaction of between-session engaged ratings, between-member engaged ratings, and group size.

that the slopes are significantly different (t value for slope difference = 3.38 , $p = .03$) between the line representing a low level of between-member engagement and a large group size and the line representing a low level of between-member engaged and a small group size. This means that when group members who typically rate the group as being less engaged (compared with the other members of their group) rate the previous session as more engaged than their own typical session rating, then the group member is more likely to attend the following session. Conversely, when group members who typically rate the group as being less engaged (compared with the other members of their group) rate the previous session as less engaged than their own typical session rating, then the group member is less likely to attend the following session. This effect is stronger (i.e., the slope is significantly steeper) for larger groups than it is for smaller groups.

Discussion

None of our hypotheses were supported. Therefore, it appears that predicting session attendance is more complicated than our simple, direct effects hypotheses would suggest. We found that when group members who typically see the group as less engaged than the other group members (i.e., low between-member engagement) see the preceding session as more engaged than they typically see sessions, they are more likely to attend the next session. However, when group members who typically see the group as more engaged than the other group members (i.e., high between-member engagement) see the preceding session as less engaged than they typically see sessions, they are also more likely to attend the next session. How can we reconcile these seemingly discrepant findings?

Expectancy confirmation/disconfirmation theory (Carlsmith & Aronson, 1963) offers one unifying explanation for the apparent discrepant findings. Specifically, group members bring with them certain expectations about how engaged group members will be during the group session. These expectations are based in part on their sense of the group's engagement in the previous sessions. When these expectations are confirmed, there is congruence between the expectation and the experience. However, when these expectations are disconfirmed, this creates cognitive

Table 1
Between-Session, Between-Member, and Between-Group Engaged; Group Size; and Session Absence

Effect	γ	SE	$t(8)$	p
Attendance intercept γ_{000}	1.49	0.11	13.26	.000
Between-group engaged γ_{001}	0.22	0.30	0.74	.477
Group size γ_{002}	0.16	0.09	1.84	.092
Between-member engaged γ_{010}	0.01	0.11	0.11	.926
Between-group engaged γ_{011}	-0.54	0.36	-1.52	.156
Group size γ_{000}	-0.10	0.06	-1.84	.093
Between-session engaged γ_{100}	-0.09	0.25	-0.35	.735
Between-group engaged γ_{101}	0.33	0.60	0.54	.599
Group size γ_{102}	0.11	0.20	0.53	.608
Between-member engaged γ_{110}	0.06	0.30	0.21	.837
Between-group engaged γ_{111}	-0.46	1.00	-0.47	.647
Group size γ_{112}	-0.61	0.17	-3.53	.005

dissonance. When cognitive dissonance occurs, people are motivated to reduce it.

When group members who see the group as more engaged (relative to the other members of their group) instead see a session as less engaged than they usually see sessions (relative to other sessions), this experience constitutes a disconfirmed expectation and therefore creates cognitive dissonance. Additionally, when group members who typically see the group as less engaged (relative to the other members of their group) instead see a session as more engaged than they usually see sessions (relative to other sessions), this experience constitutes another type of disconfirmed expectation, but again results in creating cognitive dissonance for these group members. Therefore, group members—for nearly opposite reasons—find themselves in the same position of being confronted with having to reduce cognitive dissonance. And although there are many ways a group member can attempt to reduce this dissonance, from a behavioral perspective, attending the next group session will likely give the group member more information about what is “going on” in the group. Attendance allows the group member to acquire more information. Attendance, therefore, is a strategy to reduce cognitive dissonance by acquiring additional information.

It also appears that larger group size may exacerbate a group member’s cognitive dissonance. Larger groups are less predictable than smaller groups because there is less normative control in larger groups. Therefore, it appears that large group size combines with disconfirmed expectations to amplify group member uncertainty.

Strengths

This study is one of a small group of studies (Kivlighan et al., 2012; Paquin et al., 2011) in which attendance at the session level has been examined. Most of the studies examining attendance have examined attendance at the member level, as a percentage of sessions attended. Our results showed that session-level and member-level dynamics interacted to predict group attendance. This important interaction would have been missed if attendance had only been studied at the member level. On the basis of our results, it is important for future research to also examine attendance at the session level.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first group counseling study in which Curran and Bauer’s (2011) model to decompose a group process variable into between-group, between-member, and between-session components has been used. Recently, Hoffart, Øktedalen, Formo Langkaas, and Wampold (2013) used variance partitioning to examine between-client and between-session changes in the alliance and changes in posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. In both the current study and in Hoffart et al. (2013), between-session changes in treatment processes were important predictors of the outcome measured. We believe it is important for group researchers to measure processes and outcomes over time and to use variance partitioning to understand which type of variance is most important in predicting various types of outcomes.

An additional strength of the current study is its focus on a non-Western sample. Most of our group counseling knowledge comes from Western samples. The current study is one of a growing number of studies in which group processes and outcomes

in other cultural contexts have been examined. The internationalization of group counseling research is important because it is only with accumulating studies do we begin to understand both the emic and etic nature of group counseling processes. A final strength of the current study relates to common rater confounds (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008). Most research on group counseling suffers from common rater confounds (Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008), which occurs when group members rate all of the variables examined. By using attendance, a behavioral measure, we were able to avoid interpretation problems associated with this confound.

Limitations

The current study is correlational; therefore, causal implications about the relationships between group engagement and session attendance cannot be concluded. It is important to note, however, that perceptions of engagement temporally preceded attendance. As Jones, Ghannam, Nigg, and Dyer (1993) pointed out, establishing temporal precedence moves us a step closer to understanding causality. Second, as mentioned above, studying engagement and attendance in Taiwan adds an important cross-cultural perspective to the group counseling literature. However, the effects of between-session and between-member perceptions of engagement in diverse cultural contexts may be different. Therefore, it would be important to replicate these results with groups occurring in other cultural contexts. We were fortunate that the Chinese version of the GCQ-S has been commonly used and its validity is well established. However, we do not know whether other group process measures can be transported across cultures. This is an area for future development. In addition, the engaged scales coefficient alpha was acceptable but low. The engaged items may not hang together as well when used with groups in Taiwan or in other societies with ties to China and Chinese culture. Further study is needed to explore cultural similarities or differences regarding the construct of group climate and its many dimensions.

Implications

The results suggest that disconfirmed expectations, in terms of the perceptions of the group’s engagement, motivate group members to reduce cognitive dissonance created by an unexpected experience. When people do not know what to expect, they may be motivated to attend sessions in order to get more information. Conversely, when group members’ climate expectations are confirmed, they are at risk for missing the next session. Another way to conceptualize these disconfirmed expectations is in terms of fit. The members’ current experience of the group’s climate do not fit with their previous perceptions. Paquin et al. (2011) also examined fit and absences in groups. In their study, when a group member’s in-session behaviors did not fit with the behaviors of the other group members, the member’s likelihood of missing the next session increases. Therefore, there appear to be two different kinds of fit in groups, “fit with self” and “fit with others,” which operate differently with respect to group member absences.

There appear to be two strains of thought among group theorists and practitioners concerning the best way to end group sessions. Some theorists (e.g., Jacobs, Masson, & Harvill, 1998) suggest that group leaders use a structured activity, like sharing reactions to the

session, to wind down the session. These authors believe that dissonance or discomfort should not be carried out of the group session. Gestalt group therapists, however, believe that dissonance or discomfort at the end of the group is beneficial because it motivates group members to complete the gestalt, in this case, to get more information about the group's engagement. The results of our research suggest that, in terms of attendance in the next session, the group leader may want to highlight the dissonance that group members may feel within themselves. Our distinction between "fit with self" and "fit with others" may resolve the conflict between the two schools of thought about how to end group sessions. Perhaps a lack of "fit with self" should be highlighted with an invitation to group members to allow it to remain unresolved, whereas leaders should engage in some attempt to resolve a lack of "fit with others," as this type of fit, if left unchallenged, may lead to early termination.

Many group leaders end sessions by asking the group members to reflect on and evaluate the session. Exploring group members' sense of engagement in the session is one important focus for this type of reflection. The results of this research suggest that it is not sufficient to have group members just reflect on their perceptions of engagement in the current session. Rather, group leaders need to help group members reflect on how their perceptions of engagement in the current session fit their overall sense of the group's engagement. Group leaders may be especially important in helping members compare current experiences with previous perceptions. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) suggested that one important role for the leader is to be the group historian.

As seen above, it is important for group leaders to know how consistent group members' views of the group climate are over time. However, it may be hard for group leaders to systematically know when group members' expectations are disconfirmed unless they systematically collect group member climate perceptions. For example, Slone, Reese, Mathews-Duvall, and Kodet (2013) tested a feedback model using the Partners for Change Outcome Management System (Miller, Duncan, Sorrell, & Brown, 2005) in counseling groups. Clients scored and graphed their weekly ratings of outcome and alliance and shared the graphs in the group. In this manner, all group participants and the group therapists were aware of how outcomes and alliance were changing across time. A similar model could be used to keep track of climate engagement ratings. By making this type of group process information public, therapists and other group members have a chance to interact with each other about their changing perceptions of group engagement, thus adding another layer of "grist" to the mill of group therapy.

References

- Baker, M. K., Kennedy, D. J., Bohle, P. L., Campbell, D. S., Knapman, L., Grady, J., . . . Singh, M. A. F. (2007). Efficacy and feasibility of a novel tri-modal robust exercise prescription in a retirement community: A randomized, controlled trial. *Journal of the American Geriatric Society*, 55, 1–10. doi:10.1111/j.1532-5415.2006.01031.x
- Carlsmith, J. M., & Aronson, E. (1963). Some hedonic consequences of the confirmation and disconfirmation of expectancies. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 66, 151–156. doi:10.1037/h0042692
- Credé, M., Roch, S. G., & Kieszczynka, U. M. (2010). Class attendance in college: A meta-analytic review of the relationship of class attendance with grades and student characteristics. *Review of Educational Research*, 80, 272–295. doi:10.3102/0034654310362998
- Curran, P. J., & Bauer, D. J. (2011). The disaggregation of within-person and between-person effects in longitudinal models of change. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 62, 583–619. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.093008.100356
- Gellatly, I. R., & Luchak, A. A. (1998). Personal and organizational determinants of perceived absence norms. *Human Relations*, 51, 1085–1102. doi:10.1177/001872679805100805
- Heppner, P. P., Wampold, B. E., & Kivlighan, D. M., Jr. (2008). *Research design in counseling* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.
- Hoffart, A., Øktedalen, T., Formo Langkaas, T., & Wampold, B. E. (2013). Alliance and outcome in varying imagery procedures for PTSD: A study of within-person processes. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 60, 471–482. doi:10.1037/a0033604
- Hsu, Y.-K., Paquin, J. D., & Kivlighan, D. M., Jr. (2014). Why are we disclosing in this group? Using response surface analysis to examine reasons for self-disclosure among Taiwanese counseling group members. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 18, 20–37. doi:10.1037/a0034671
- Illardi, D. L., & Kaslow, N. J. (2009). Social difficulties influence group psychotherapy adherence in abused, suicidal African American women. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 65, 1300–1311. doi:10.1002/jclp.20628
- Jacobs, E. E., Masson, R. L., & Harvill, R. L. (1998). *Group counseling: Strategies and skills* (3rd ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.
- Jehn, K. A., Northcraft, G. B., & Neale, M. A. (1999). Why differences make a difference: A field study of diversity, conflict, and performance in workgroups. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44, 741–763. doi:10.2307/2667054
- Jones, E. E., Ghannam, J., Nigg, J. T., & Dyer, J. F. (1993). A paradigm for single-case research: The time series study of a long-term psychotherapy for depression. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61, 381–394. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.61.3.381
- Kivlighan, D. M., Jr., Kivlighan, D. M., III, & Cole, O. (2012). The group's absence norm and commitment to the group as predictors of group member absence in the next session: An actor-partner analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 59, 41–49. doi:10.1037/a0025506
- Laughlin, P. R., Hatch, E. C., Silver, J. S., & Boh, L. (2006). Groups perform better than the best individuals on letters-to-numbers problems: Effects of group size. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 644–651. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.90.4.644
- MacKenzie, K. R. (1983). The clinical application of a group climate measure. In R. R. Dies & K. R. MacKenzie (Eds.), *Advances in group psychotherapy: Integrating research and practice* (pp. 159–170). Madison, CT: International Universities Press.
- MacNair, R. R., & Corazzini, J. (1994). Client factors influencing group therapy dropout. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 31, 352–362. doi:10.1037/h0090226
- MacNair-Semands, R. R. (2002). Predicting attendance and expectations for group therapy. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 6, 219–228. doi:10.1037/1089-2699.6.3.219
- McCallum, M., Piper, W. E., Ogrodniczuk, J. S., & Joyce, A. S. (2002). Early process and dropping out from short-term group therapy for complicated grief. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 6, 243–254. doi:10.1037/1089-2699.6.3.243
- McClendon, D. T., & Burlingame, G. M. (2010). Group climate: construct in search of clarity. In R. K. Conyne (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of group counseling* (pp. 164–181). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Miller, S. D., Duncan, B. L., Sorrell, R., & Brown, G. S. (2005). The partners for change outcome management system. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 61, 199–208. doi:10.1002/jclp.20111
- Nix, R. L., Bierman, K. L., McMahon, R. J., & the Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group. (2009). How absence and quality of participation affect treatment response to parent management training. *Journal*

- of *Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 77, 429–438. doi:10.1037/a0015028
- Ogrodniczuk, J. S., Piper, W. E., & Joyce, A. S. (2006). Treatment compliance among patients with personality disorders receiving group psychotherapy: What are the roles of interpersonal distress and cohesion? *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes*, 69, 249–261. doi:10.1521/psyc.2006.69.3.249
- Paquin, J. D., Miles, J. R., & Kivlighan, D. M., Jr. (2011). Predicting group attendance absence using in-session behaviors. *Small Group Research*, 42, 177–198. doi:10.1177/1046496410389493
- Rentsch, J. R., & Steel, R. P. (2003). What does unit-level absence mean? Issues for future unit-level absence research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 13, 185–202. doi:10.1016/S1053-4822(03)00012-3
- Shaw, M. E. (1981). *Group dynamics: The psychology of small group behavior*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Shechtman, Z., & Dvir, V. (2006). Attachment style as a predictor of behavior in group counseling with preadolescents. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 10, 29–42. doi:10.1037/1089-2699.10.1.29
- Singer, J. D., & Willett, J. B. (2003). *Applied longitudinal data analysis: Modeling change and event occurrence*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195152968.001.0001
- Slone, N. C., Reese, R. J., Mathews-Duvall, S., & Kodet, J. (2013). *Evaluating the efficacy of client feedback in group psychotherapy*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Stone, W., Blase, M., & Bozzuto, J. (1980). Late dropouts from group therapy. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 34, 401–413.
- Wang, L. F., & Lin, M. J. (2000). The development of the “Scale of Group Therapeutic Factors.” *Chinese Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, 9, 1–24.
- Wang, Y. L., Chen, M. J., Wang, L. F., & Lin, M. J. (2012). Application of multilevel latent variable models on perceived and contextual group climate. *Chinese Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, 32, 33–55.
- Yalom, I. D., & Leszcz, M. (2005). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Received November 18, 2013

Revision received March 11, 2014

Accepted March 12, 2014 ■