THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY INTERNALIZED EXPERIENCES ON ADULT LEARNING GROUPS

by

JANICE MORGAN SATURDAY

Under the Direction of Thomas Valentine

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe an adult learning group from a psychodynamic orientation. Particular attention was paid to the way in which external experiences, both past and present, were internalized by the group members. Connections between present behavior and early internalized experiences were examined and linked to how the adult learner experienced the group. The primary means of data collection were semi-structured individual interviews. Data were analyzed using a holistic analysis. The results of the study revealed that (a) group behavior can be illuminated by recognizing psychological characteristics of individuals and how they combine, (b) groups engage in patterns of behavior that cannot be predicted beforehand but can be observed, identified, and then anticipated and (c) psychodynamic forces can affect learning, increasing the need for group facilitators to be acutely aware of the purpose of groupwork.

INDEX WORDS: Group dynamics, Adult learning, Adult learning in groups, Effectiveness of group-based learning, Adult learning and group dynamics, History of adult learning groups, Unconscious dynamics in adult learning, Qualitative research, Psychodynamic psychology
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ON ADULT LEARNING GROUPS

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated in loving memory of

Myrtle Morgan

and to

Gipson E. Morgan
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge with great appreciation the support and guidance offered by my major professor and committee members. Dr. Thomas Valentine created intellectual space that allowed me to pursue the study of adult learning groups from a novel perspective. He provided encouragement and vision that were necessary to sustain an undertaking of this nature. Dr. Ron Cervero’s insight and understanding of the perspective from which this study was written maintained my belief in the importance of the psychodynamic point of view. He also supplied motivation and had an intuitive sense of when an encouraging prod was appropriate. Dr. Laura Bierema’s gentle way of guiding and offering advice is not to be underestimated. It was her silent note written in my prospectus notebook that provided exactly the right wording for my dissertation title. Dr. Deryl Bailey offered expert advice on the content of this study. He graciously agreed to serve on my committee even though his schedule and responsibilities were quite hectic during this period in his academic career.

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Claire Brown, who was the impetus for my interest and love of the psychoanalytic approach. For over five years she skillfully sustained a space that forever changed the way I view and exist in the world. Finally, my sincere love and appreciation are extended to my sister’s, Barbara, Bonnie, and Melanie, whose strength and intelligence I admire and often seek. I can always count on my dear sisters to provide eternal support for my life adventures and a soft place for me to fall.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</th>
<th>vi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How I Experienced a Disintegrating Group</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Personal History in Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Psychological Perspective at the Heart of This Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Work and Adult Education</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Approach</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolution of the Literature on Groups in Adult Education</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Orientations Used to Study Group Work</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Psychodynamic Orientation to the Study of Groups in Adult Education</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiques of Psychoanalytic Theory</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoanalytic Theory and Education</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 THE APPROACH</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>FINDINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synopsis of Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evolution of the Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Four Significant Episodes That Illustrate the Psychodynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Realities of Group-Based Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Episode #1: The Group Reacted to a Symbolic Picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Episode #2: The Group was Frozen in the Face of Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Episode #3: The Group was Disable by Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Episode #4: How the Group Depicted Itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion of Principal Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications for Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications for Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>RESEARCH OVERVIEW DISTRIBUTED TO PARTICIPANTS AT FIRST MEETING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>CONSENT FORM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>BIOGRAPHICAL DATA SHEET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>INTERVIEW GUIDE ABOUT GROUP HISTORY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
E  INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THESIS SUPERVISOR.................................129
F  INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SECOND INTERVIEW WITH JULIA ........131
G INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SECOND INTERVIEW WITH KATE.........133
H INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SECOND INTERVIEW WITH RENEE.......135
I INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THIRD INTERVIEW WITH JULIA..............137
J INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THIRD INTERVIEW WITH KATE ..............140
K INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THIRD INTERVIEW WITH RENEE ..........143
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.0 Groups During the Twentieth Century</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0 Description of Participants</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Data Collection Plan</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0 Four Significant Episodes that Illustrate the Psychodynamic Realities of the Group</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Analytical Description of Episode #1: The Group Reacted to a Symbolic Picture</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Analytical Description of Episode #2: The Group was Frozen in the Face of Authority</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Analytical Description of Episode #3: The Group was Disabled by Anxiety</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Analytical Description of Episode #4: How the Group Depicted Itself</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

No one enters an educational setting without bringing along the experiences that have shaped one’s life. Temperament, life experience--particularly early internalized experiences--and unconscious processes blend to influence the nature of each individual. Any adult learning group is made up of a collection of individuals that display countless variations of temperament, life experience, and unconscious processes.

At some level I knew that groups were complex entities comprised of members who possessed multiple realities, but it was driven home dramatically when these same themes began to play out in a recent group experience of my own that occurred in a graduate class. When I experienced the structure of a group disintegrate, my search for a more complete understanding of the group experience began. What follows is my recollection of how the group evolved.

How I Experienced a Disintegrating Group

Most of the members of the group knew each other well, having participated in other classes together. Initially, the group process seemed to flow smoothly. Every member of the group was a novice researcher; nervous but excited about tackling the research project. The group quickly bonded and our work sessions were productive. Although there were various personalities in the group, ranging from the introverted to the boisterous, each person contributed equally to the project. This was a serious group, each member contributed sound ideas, intelligence, and strong opinions.
On the final night of class our group was scheduled to present the findings from our research. About three weeks prior to the last night we began to develop our presentation. Each group member was strongly invested in his or her portion of the presentation and our critique sessions rapidly lost structure. People began talking over each other and the atmosphere in the room became highly charged. Group members were interrupting each other. Questions and comments were stated loudly, quickly, and from several members at once.

I felt overwhelmed and very uncomfortable with the group dynamics. Although my family of origin used indirect behavior when conflict arose in the family, it became apparent that the indirect model was not effective in this particular context. The intensity and overt nature of the environment hampered my ability to manage my emotional reaction to the change in the group dynamics. Consequently, both my effectiveness as a group member and my learning were impeded. But more importantly, my sense of myself as a contributing group member felt threatened.

When the group ended, my initial reaction was to adopt an instrumentalist attitude and attribute the dynamics to differences in personality, the way in which the group was structured, and our inexperience as researchers. But after much introspection and discussion with other members of the group, I became convinced that unconscious dynamics, family history, past experiences, and individual temperaments influenced the behavior and dynamics of the group setting. This experience provided a turning point in my personal and professional growth.
My Personal History in Groups

My search to understand the group experience began with an examination of my own past. The first group that I experienced was my family group. Within that experience I developed the norms and expectations that influence my present behavior in any group setting. The patterns set in this early learning carry on to this day.

I am the third of four daughters from a white, middle class, conservative Southern family. My role models for healthy conflict are limited because my family of origin avoided dealing with conflict openly. For example, recently my youngest sister sensed, at a family birthday celebration, that my second sister was alienated over something. She e-mailed me and called our oldest sister to relate the circumstances. In classic family style the eldest then called sister number two in an attempt to uncover the mystery. Indeed this is a scenario that illustrates the way in which my family members commonly deal with conflict in the family group.

Groups are a pervasive part of the adult education experience and my recollection of the disintegrating group encounter increased my interest in how the collection of individual temperaments, life experience, and unconscious processes contribute to the group experience for each and every group member. Others from my group struggled with the dynamics of this learning experience. However there were also group members who felt comfortable with the “energized and stimulating” dynamics of the group. My encounter with the different interpretations of the same experience led me to an increased awareness that group work is indeed complicated. My deeper awareness, of the complexity of the environment that is created in groups, has invoked a mindfulness of increased accountability on the part of the group facilitator.
The Psychological Perspective at the Heart of This Study

The literature on psychology, in the broadest sense, is huge and multi-faceted; however, the one particular aspect of psychology I am most interested in here is a psychodynamic description of the group experience. The psychodynamic perspective that was used in this study is based on the theory of psychoanalysis. “The idea of psychological conflict,…is central to the psychodynamic perspective. …It was one of Freud’s great insights that our experiences are dynamic – that is, the outcome of conflicting forces, ideas and wishes” (Lemma-Wright, 1995, p. 13). Fundamental to the theoretical model of the mind put forward by Freud as well as many psychodynamic schools “is the idea of different psychic levels or, if you like, different levels of consciousness” (Lemma-Wright, 1995, p. 13).

For the purposes of this study, I will talk about two levels of consciousness, unconscious and preconscious. The first level, unconscious, is deeply hidden and difficult to reach without the expertise of trained professionals. Anna Freud best describes the second one:

It is possible to demonstrate thought processes which temporarily disappear from the surface of consciousness and which descriptively are therefore unconscious, though they do not change character by disappearing. They merely make room for other, at the moment more relevant thought processes, but for this purpose they leave the realm of consciousness only temporarily; they can at any time without difficulties again return to it. In psycho-analysis they are called preconscious, a term that is meant to characterize their position of waiting in the forecourt of consciousness. (Freud, 1986, p. 132)
It is the preconscious level of unconscious, rather than deeper levels of unconscious that are tapped by trained professionals in therapy, that this study will attempt to access.

Groups are active systems that influence members individually and collectively. Gladding (1999) maintains:

Basically, people act differently in groups than they do by themselves. As a general rule, primary affiliation groups (i.e., those with which people most identify, such as a family or peers) exert greater pressure on individuals than secondary affiliation groups (i.e., those with which people least identify, such as city or confederation). (p. 44)

In this study I made use of a foundational concept from psychodynamic psychology (Lemma-Wright, 1995) that assumed the attitudes, values and habits developed in the first group in a person’s life, the family, strongly influence present day behavior. The dynamics that arise in a group may also influence the feelings a person has toward the group leader and other group members. In addition, the orientation I describe includes behavior and motivations that are influenced by processes of which a person may not be aware.

Transference is the emotional relationship that develops between two or more people and is based on emotional attitudes left over from childhood, which are transferred to the current situation (Berne, 1968, p. 372). Transference is carried on at primarily an unconscious level. There is a tendency for group members to interact in the group as they did in their family of origin. For example, group leaders and other members may be perceived as authority figures from the group members past. The transference toward
others may be positive and consequently affectionate and/or negative and therefore hostile.

If an instructor’s methods are rejected by some of the class members, the most apparent reason may be that the methods are inappropriate or outdated. The most apparent reason may be only a partial explanation. The instructor may have challenged valued ideas and beliefs that caused negative responses towards him/her. The instructor has symbolized a hostile authority figure for some of the class members. This example illustrates transference and the complexity of the situation. Although the instructor cannot control transference she can be aware of and expect transference in a group and classroom setting. The instructor also has considerable control over other factors, such as the teaching methods used.

The psychodynamic orientation that I employed for this study included three major premises. The first belief was that our experiences are both dynamic and partially the result of psychological conflict. Next, there are different levels of consciousness that influence our behavior. Finally, our present day behavior is influenced by both past internalized experiences and pivotal people from our past.

Group Work and Adult Education

A historical review of group-based learning strategies in adult education reflects that groups have been used to develop leadership, promote democracy, raise consciousness, and bring about social change. In the adult education classroom, small group work, discussion, and other activities are often implemented to encourage a more dynamic, participatory learning environment. Group work continues to be a significant instructional strategy in the American adult education classroom. Recently several adult
education scholars (Foley, 1992; Imel and Tisdell, 1996; Knights, 1993) have noted that the literature dealing with group work in adult education is primarily based on a combination of instrumentalism and humanistic psychology. They are in agreement that aspects of group work dealt with from this perspective leave deeper problems unresolved. Although group work has a long history in adult education there has been an unsophisticated understanding of the psychodynamics that exist in group work.

Scholars who use an instrumentalist perspective take for granted that student learning is controlled by the teacher. Furthermore, an instrumentalist attitude has been applied to group work, with educators believing that if they follow the appropriate set of steps then the outcomes will be successful. Foley (1992) stresses the impairment to learning that results by continuing to use the instrumentalist framework:

This approach is dangerous, because it simplifies complex reality and promotes the idea that teachers can and should control learning. But one of the reasons that instrumentalism retains its hold on educators is that it does provide explanations and suggestions for action, however simplistic and flawed. (p. 148)

Scholars who espouse the humanistic orientation assume that groups are a fundamentally healthy learning approach and group leaders generally assume the role of mediator and caretaker. In reality the group can be an environment where learning is advanced and blocked.

Group-based learning in the field of adult education has been embraced but what can be learned from the unconscious processes that are present in the group experience has not been seriously considered. By using a psychodynamic lens to study learning groups the knowledge provided by the instrumentalist and humanistic approach can be
extended to include the impact of processes of which we may not be aware.

Instrumentalism and the humanistic approach have exerted a strong but unbalanced influence on adult learning groups.

Some would argue that group work, as an instructional strategy, has served adult educators well for all the reasons stated--its humanistic orientation, its ability to produce social change, its power in consciousness raising--however, this is an unsophisticated approach. The use of group-based learning as a way in which to make the learning environment more dynamic is appropriate and a sign of good teaching practice. However, I argue there are alternate ways to use group-based learning that have been largely overlooked in adult education. Adult learning group research and practice can be expanded to include the exploration of psychodynamic processes and the multiple perspectives that are accessed through the use of psychodynamic concepts.

The exploration of how early experiences and internal processes of which we are not aware affect adult learning is an area that can provide direction about what and how we understand adult learning groups. Several scholars including Boyd (1989, 1991), Dirkx (1998, 2000), Foley (1992) and Knights (1993) have shown interest and made an effort to include these ideas in the adult education literature. Imel and Tisdell (1996) advocate a need to move beyond the instrumentalist and humanistic psychology approach to group work. The interest shown by these adult educators leads me to be optimistic that the field of adult education may be prepared to embrace these ideas.

Recently, educational researchers have been using psychodynamic theory to expand our understanding of the learning process (Britzman 1998; Fenwick, 2001). The interplay between the learner’s internal and external world not only affects how we learn
but also what we learn. Britzman (1998), in discussing education in the K to 12 system, describes this exchange in the educational setting between the internal and external world as interference. Britzman states:

In positing education as a question of interference (as opposed to an engineered development), we have a very different epistemology and ontology of actions, and actors: one that insists that the inside of actors is as complicated as the outside, and that this combination is the grounds of education. Not only does the world impinge cruelly upon the subject, and not only does the subject’s inner world constitute the be-all of understanding and misunderstanding: the subject lives both dilemmas in ways that cannot be predicted, authorized by another, or even deliberately planned and separated. (p. 6)

Indeed this approach to research is complicated and requires long patience but the learning is rich. Britzman explains, “Neither internal nor external reality is simple. To tolerate this insight is just the beginning of what Freud calls ‘working through’ or learning” (p. 6).

Because adult educators encounter both internal pressure (from themselves) and external pressure (from students and institutions) to resort to problem solving to reduce the learners’ conflicts, the psychodynamic orientation can be difficult and unpopular. Britzman (1998) summarizes how this dilemma may look in the educational setting: “The quest is frustrated by the impatient response of both teachers and students when something cannot measure up, indeed when what is given up is the capacity to tolerate learning” (p. 25). Consequently, adult educators who are interested in the learning possibilities that exist in the group experience from a psychodynamic orientation must
tolerate the various ways in which learning may occur and the time frame that may render learning in delayed time.

As educators we seek definitive findings in a search for *truth*. Our search can lead us to settle for answers that simplify, dichotomize, and minimize the complexities and mystery that is not readily explained. In our effort to reduce our anxiety and raise our security we attempt to control the events of the learning environment with the cost being a loss of the rich learning potential that exists in the subtleties of less commonly explored perspectives. Fenwick (2001) describes how adult educators can increase the possibility of learning, “We learn by working through the conflicts of all these psychic events. Adult learning is thus coming to tolerate one’s own conflicting desires, while recovering the selves that are repressed from our terror of full self-knowledge” (p. 32).

Statement of the Problem

Group work is often used as a teaching strategy in the adult education classroom. While the significance of group work based on a combination of instrumentalism and humanistic psychology has been discussed in the adult education literature, the psychodynamic perspective of group participants has rarely been considered. Groups are complex entities that provide a rich source of learning opportunities for adult educators. Nevertheless, we have not explored the range of possibilities; we do have another option within psychodynamic theory with which to study group-based learning.

Purpose of the Study

The research objectives that guided this study were:

(1) to describe an adult learning group from a psychodynamic orientation.
(2) to understand how the internal world of group members influenced group interaction.

(3) to explore connections between past experiences and present behavior that affected the group member’s experience of the group.

The Approach

In this study, I closely examined a group, in an educational setting, that was responsible for the development of a group project. A small group of women in a higher education setting involved in an intensive learning experience set the stage for the development of this qualitative case study. By positing the researcher and research participant as a psychosocial and defended subject, the ambiguities, depth, and complexity of group work were illuminated and consequently a fuller and more complete picture of group learning was captured. Interaction among group members drew out behaviors that encompass issues that adult educators may or may not foresee when using group work as an instructional strategy. Whereas some of the responses may be anticipated there are other behaviors that are beyond the control of the adult educator. It can be surprising and unsettling when the experienced adult educator encounters group dynamics that are unexpected. The dynamics that take place in the group setting are complex, relational, and different for each individual. The relational and social conditions that are available in the group setting offer abundant possibilities for learning when observed from a psychodynamic perspective.

The perspective that guided this study was not narrowly psychoanalytic but included a psychosocial dimension. The research participant was posited as a psychosocial and defended subject who was invested in discourses that prevented anxiety
and that supported her identity. A psychosocial subject is characterized as a person who cannot be understood without knowledge of her external experiences and how she interprets meaning in light of her internal world. I argue that defense mechanisms were utilized in order to defend against the anxiety a participant experienced when she intuits that her sense of self is being threatened. The use of defense mechanisms by a group member affected the participant’s learning as well as the learning of the entire group.

The theory of the defended subject used in this study was borrowed from Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000) study on the fear of crime. It was assumed that in an effort to protect her sense of self, the research subject positioned herself in a particular discourse. This way of theorizing the subject is explained by Hollway and Jefferson (2000):

This argument assumes that threats to the self create anxiety, and indeed this is a fundamental proposition in psychoanalytic theory, where anxiety is viewed as being inherent in the human condition. For psychoanalysis, anxiety precipitates defences against the threats it poses to the self and these operate at a largely unconscious level. (p. 19)

My use of a psychodynamic model to study adult learning groups included an acceptance of psychological conflict. By accepting and attempting to understand conflicting parts of our selves that we resist, we can achieve more mature and productive ways to cope with desires and fears. In turn, greater self-knowledge can enable us to tolerate and guide this same learning in our students. In addition, the use and understanding of this perspective offer the researcher a broader, deeper, and more complex way of viewing group-based learning. A psychodynamic perspective includes the belief that there are forces and counterforces that operate on an individual’s behavior.
Finally, if this lens is used there is an acceptance of the importance of our past experiences, including the pivotal people from our past.

Significance of the Study

By looking at adult learning groups through a psychodynamic lens, a number of significant theoretical and practical contributions are derived from the completion of this study. Theoretically, it illuminated the complexity of group work so that a more balanced and complete understanding of group work was attained. Because the instrumentalist and humanistic approach to group work minimize the effect of unconscious and internal processes, there was a need to explore adult learning groups from a perspective that incorporated a deeper understanding of how unconscious processes and the internal world of the group member influenced the learning group.

Practical significance was derived from completion of the study as well, such as insight into the group process that will help adult educators more effectively utilize groups in their practice. Another contribution derived from the study was an enhancement of understanding about how to identify psychodynamic processes that can affect learning. There are foundational concepts from psychodynamic theory, such as psychological conflict, different levels of consciousness, and the importance of past experiences, that increase the effective use of groups by the adult educator.

There is a need to look at how adult educators use and understand the learning that occurs in the group setting. Often we assume that what happens in a group is primarily influenced by the way in which the group is set up and facilitated. However, much that happens in the group setting is beyond the control of adult educators. We also assume that groups provide a healthy learning environment yet the research shows that in
some situations the group can hinder learning. By gaining a deeper understanding of the processes that influence group learning, adult educators can make more prudent choices about the use of groups. In addition, the adult learner can gain greater insights into how his/her behavior may hinder or help the group process.

What does a view of group learning through a psychodynamic lens mean for adult education? The most obvious understanding is that the varied perspectives of the group experience must be recognized. Each group member will have a different experience based upon a combination of unconscious processes, family history, past experience, and individual temperament. This perspective can lead to conflict and a diversity of learning experiences in the group. If adult educators are too quick to seek a solution to the conflict and diversity, then the deeper learning opportunities may be lost.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the literature relevant to this study. There are five major sections in chapter two. In the first section I review the evolution of literature on groups in adult education. In section two the different orientations to understanding group work will be discussed. Section three offers a psychodynamic orientation to understanding group work in adult education. The next section will review the most common critics of psychoanalytic theory. Finally, I present a discussion of how psychoanalytic theory and education are being merged to give a fuller picture of the complexity of group work.

Evolution of the Literature on Groups in Adult Education

Groups have been around for many decades. In this section I capture some of the major themes, related to groups, that appeared during most of the twentieth century. Table 2.0 shows a synopsis of these themes.

The use of groups, as an instructional strategy, is utilized so often in adult education practice that one would surmise the promise of great educational benefit from their use. Small group work, discussion, and other activities are implemented to encourage a more dynamic, participatory learning environment. However, Rose (1996) maintains that, “Some of this emphasis seems to be misplaced given the lack of data to show that such efforts actually lead to cognitive growth.” (p. 11)
Table 2.0

Groups During the Twentieth Century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>An expanding industrial population that valued experience over tradition. Groups were also used to build national purpose and cultural conformity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>An increase in research, literature, and training on groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Groups used to promote democracy and change behavior. A focus on group dynamics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>The development of a vocabulary and role theory related to groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Groups used to promote social change, empowerment, and self-actualization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Emergence of consciousness raising groups and social movements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Groups in the workforce were a major focus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the mixed review concerning the educational value of group work, the following questions arise: Where did the popularity of group work in adult education come from? What purpose have groups served, in the past, for adult education? How can groups best be used, for learning, in adult education today?

As early as the mid-nineteenth century when liberal education values were prevalent, adult learning groups were important in adult education. The underlying assumptions inherent in liberal education are that learning is intrinsically valuable, neutral, and rational. Benjamin Franklin’s Junto was an example of how adult education reflected liberal education values. Junto was a discussion group whose participants created essays on politics, philosophy, and ethics. Adult education activities that were steeped in liberal education values involved lectures, reading books and participating in study groups, and courses such as philosophy, literature, religion, science and the arts.
North America’s educational institutions were influenced by this philosophical orientation in the Colonial colleges where the curricula were comprised solely of liberal studies (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1984; Merriam & Brockett, 1997).

Industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and the war significantly influenced adult education and changed the purpose of group work in the first two decades of the twentieth century. With industrialization, the bygone age of craft development and informal learning were replaced with the need for an industrial workforce. The influx of immigrants and those who migrated from rural areas greatly increased the population of cities (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994).

The progressive education movement, which is harbored in the philosophy of pragmatism, began to emerge in response to an expanding industrial population. Experience and knowledge stemming from observation are valued over tradition and authority. Renowned philosopher and educator, John Dewey was a proponent for the utilization of pragmatism in education. Education is a means for social action and social change when viewed from this perspective (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1984; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Rose (1996) illuminates the pedagogical issues, as well as the disciplines that influenced this movement:

At the same time, philosophers and psychologists were reassessing the process of learning itself. Inspired by Deweyan progressive education, educators of adults became more cognizant of the environment of learning and of the structuring of the learning experience to more closely relate to the adult’s actual experienced life. (p. 5)
Around this same time period, “Americanism” was promoted as a way to encourage unity. During this period, groups were used to instruct soldiers and build teamwork among civilians and military personnel (Gladding, 1999; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). “In the ‘Americanism’ era, adult education became an instrument of national purpose, an agency for character building, cultural conformity, and opinion formation” (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994, p.180). The cultural conformity of immigrants was a manifestation of ‘Americanism’. Citizenship classes were established for immigrants at factories, community organizations, and public schools.

Since the inception of the field of study, adult education has been fascinated with groups. In the 1920s Lindeman was a proponent of the use of groups to develop leadership, democracy, and social action. He was influenced by the Scandinavian study circle, as well as Dewey, and was an advocate of progressive adult education. Lindeman valued group work as a way in which social problems might be solved (Knowles, 1959; Lindeman, 1924; Rose, 1996; Stewart, 1987). He was not comfortable with the conjectural nature of sociological studies of the group and suggested an empirical method for the study of groups. Under his influence an attempt to conduct research on the group process was undertaken. These efforts focused on Lindeman’s interest in the community and the solving of social problems (Knowles, 1959; Lindeman, 1924; Rose, 1996). Rose maintains that, “Since Lindeman’s interest in groups coincided with his writing about adult education he positioned the group as the center of the adult education experience.” (p. 6)

Mary Parker Follett was an associate and contemporary of Lindeman who was instrumental in his attempt to operationalize pragmatism within the practice of adult
education. Follett believed that groups could fulfill numerous needs of contemporary society and that adult education was the appropriate venue for learning the skill of effective group work. Follett had gained national attention with the publication of her book, *The New State*. Stewart (1987) maintains:

In this volume, she essentially proposed group organization as the key to a successful functioning of democratic entities of government. The relationship of individuals to groups, intergroup relationships, and the relationship of groups to the national government were analyzed in a way that many thought brilliant.

(p. 144)

The 1930s were an important decade in group work history. According to Malcolm Knowles and Hulda Knowles this era had several notable characteristics: (a) the establishment of several research centers that focused specifically on group phenomena, (b) an increase in the amount of literature devoted to reporting basic and applied research studies, and (c) a growth in training programs that combined research and training (Knowles & Knowles, 1959; Rose, 1996).

World War II and the 1940s created an American society that felt compelled to promote democracy. It was in this climate that Kurt Lewin’s work on group behavior emerged. Lewin’s approach, field theory, emphasized the relationship between the interdependent parts and dynamic whole of groups. His research led to the discovery that group discussions are superior to individual instruction in changing people’s behavior (Brunner, Wilder, Kirchner, & Newberry, 1959; Gladding, 1999). Lewin was interested in education as a tool for change and the practical outcomes of learning. His research led to the awareness of the following ideas:
• Group discussions are superior to individual instruction in changing behavior.

• Three basic styles of group leadership are: 1) authoritarian 2) democratic 3) laissez-faire.

• The origin of the term group dynamics.

• The application of the concept of feedback to study group work.

   Lewin’s work was instrumental in the formation of the National Training Laboratories (NTL) in Bethel, Maine. “The National Training Laboratory was designed as a unit within the National Education Association’s (NEA) Department of Adult Education to study group processes” (Rose, 1996, p. 9). The earliest endeavors of the NTL concentrated on leadership development and how group dynamics research could be used for social change. Lippitt, Bradford, Benne, and others sought to further develop Lewin’s work in the 1950s to formulate the concept of training-groups (T-groups). Adult educators adopted many of the T-group methods such as role play, participatory techniques, and an emphasis on nonlecture formats. Rose (1996) highlights the use of T-groups:

   Because T-groups originally grew out of research on intergroup relations, they were initially perceived as an important tool in the emerging area of human relations work. Surprisingly, however, the first widespread use of T-groups was as a management tool. T-groups were viewed as a way of helping individuals reassess their relationship with their organizations and reconceptualize their work. (p. 10)

   In 1948, Bion’s theoretical writings and practices on group dynamics had a major impact on the formal development of groups and has exerted some influence on the adult
learning group. Bion was a member of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in Great Britain and a practicing psychoanalyst. He utilized concepts from psychoanalyst Melanie Klein’s theories in his study of group phenomena. The Tavistock approach to study group work uses diverse approaches to the study of groups, which include expanding the scope of group dynamics to include unconscious processes.

Gladding (1999) reports that a greater refinement in group work characterized the 1950s. Some of the important milestones in group development during this period were:

- The understanding that group members adopt stereotypical roles
- The development of a vocabulary related to groups
- Group process concepts applied to family counseling
- Total quality groups appeared at this time

During the civil rights era when it became very important for disempowered people to gain a voice, group learning activities became a pivotal part of the modern civil rights movement. The Highlander Folk School in New Market, Tennessee attained visibility during this period. During the 1950s and 1960s Highlander played a major part in supporting the civil rights movement in the South by offering an array of literacy programs, voter-registration clinics, and community-organizing seminars (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). This form of group based activity is yet another example of how adult education has been used as a vehicle for social change.

In 1957, the Fund for Adult Education furnished a grant that was utilized to conduct an inventory of research in adult education. The project had two objectives:

(1) to identify generalizations on which policy, curriculum, and practice could be based,
(2) to identify areas of needed research in the field of adult education. The project
conducted a survey of small group research that could have implications for adult education. The results were mixed and sometimes contradictory. Some reviews clearly maintained there is no justification from research findings that advocate that education should always take place in groups (Brunner et al., 1959; Rose, 1996). In referring to the development of groups in the social welfare field, Brunner et al. maintained, “Many adult educators seem to have accepted this technique uncritically. What research there is indicates that groups may be more effective in achieving social objectives than strictly educational ones” (p. 197). There was also evidence that groups hindered learning and independent thinking.

The simplistic characterization of group learning that was garnered from the Fund for Adult Education presents a unitary and unbalanced view of group learning. In addition, Knights (1993) presents a more balanced perspective of both the positive and negative aspects of group work:

Groups [can] exert powerful influence both to advance and to obstruct learning. A group can be an environment in which people invent and explore symbolic structures for understanding the world, learning from each other and trying out for themselves the discourse of the domain of knowledge they seek to acquire. Alternatively, groups can encourage conformity, squander time and energy on ritual combat, revel in failure, and generally engage in all sorts of fantasy tasks that have little or nothing to do with learning. (p. 185)

In 1959, a book by Malcolm and Hulda Knowles entitled, Introduction to Group Dynamics was published. They list an overview of principal approaches to groups:
(a) the field theoretical approach, (b) the factor analysis approach, (c) the formal organization approach, (d) the sociometric approach (e) the interaction analysis approach, (f) the psychoanalytic approach and, (g) the social group work approach.

During the 1960s, the humanistic philosophical orientation began to influence adult education. Knowles and Rogers were well-known proponents of this philosophy. This point of view is learner centered and focuses on self-actualization. These premises provide a foundation for principles of adult learning theory that stress the self-directedness of adults and the value of experience in the learning process. Knowles’s theory of andragogy, with its assumptions about the adult learner, and much of the research and writing regarding self-directed learning are grounded in humanistic learning theories (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 258). In this approach the learning group is seen as:

an organism, having a sense of its own direction even though it could not define that direction intellectually. . . . A group recognises unhealthy elements in its process, focuses on them, cleans them up or eliminates them, and moves toward becoming a healthy group. Rogers (as cited in Foley, 1992) 

During this era, which was influenced by primarily a humanistic philosophical orientation, the learning group was viewed as very supportive and its proponents adopted an optimistic view of group work.

Similarly in the 1960s groups were used as a way to give voice to women who sought to work on a different construction of reality and expand their role in the sociopolitical context. The establishment of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique*, and activities of The National
Organization for Women (NOW) helped to give rise to women’s consciousness-raising groups. The learning principles used by these groups empowered women to share their personal experiences and use the experiences to understand female oppression in a larger context (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994).

The work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire began to have a profound impact in adult education in the 1970s. Freire maintained that the “banking” approach to knowledge creation supported the status quo. Freire believed that the construction of reality was achieved through authentic dialogue; consequently, this belief had a tremendous influence on group work in adult education. Freire’s work with the impoverished people of Brazil led to his theory that the members of an oppressed group can think critically and that knowledge will arise from struggle (Freire, 1970). The philosophical underpinnings of Freire’s pedagogy continue to influence adult education today. Critical forms of research and inquiry challenge conventional social structures and commonly held values and assumptions in the cause of social justice (Crotty, 1998, p.157). In addition to the consciousness raising groups and the influence of the work that Freire did with oppressed groups, the social movement was an important vehicle for promoting social change in adult education history. New social movements have recently re-surfaced as a way to support and build community-based groups that continue the tradition of social action through adult education programs.

The Japanese earned a reputation for excellence and top quality in production and manufacturing during the 1980s and influenced the human resource and organizational development sector of adult education. This fostered a competitive spirit in the US workplace that was manifest through the appearance of books such as In Search of

Darkenwald & Merriam (1984) label the philosophical orientation that dominated this period as organization effectiveness. The orientation is performance-based and the ultimate aim is to improve organization, effectiveness, and strive for measurable change. The social context is the organization and its stakeholders.

Deming (1986) believed that by applying his fourteen principles to organizational management that the maximum in efficiency and effectiveness in products and services would be reached. The Total Quality Management theory was based on seeking quality outcomes through tools and techniques that use data to make decisions, solve problems, and achieve continuous improvement. Central to the idea of continuous improvement is the use of the scientific method in making databased decisions that get to the root cause of the problem, human or mechanical. In an attempt to compete with the Japanese, the Total Quality Management techniques became a common approach to supervision and management in schools, business, and industry. These tools were used with groups as well as individuals.

Adult group work has been utilized in an attempt to promote social change, democracy, consciousness raising, and community building. Although psychology has been credited with an influence on our thinking about groups, adult educators have not given a great deal of attention to the study of groups from a psychoanalytic perspective. Certainly, this perspective has been noticed and written about sporadically; however, it is not an area that has had much influence on the study of groups in adult education.

This section provided a broad overview of how group work has been used in adult education. The next section will discuss different orientations to study group work.
including the most traditional orientations that have been used by adult educators to understand groups. Then a psychodynamic view to group work will be examined.

Different Orientations Used to Study Group Work

The review of the evolution literature on groups in adult education, that was written about in the previous section, elucidates the importance of group work, as an instructional strategy, in adult education. Although groups have been written about and studied, a particular orientation to groups has been emphasized. The literature dealing with group work in adult education is primarily based on a combination of instrumentalism and humanistic psychology (Foley, 1992; Imel & Tisdell, 1996). This approach to study group work overlooks unconscious processes. A psychodynamic orientation to study group work will consider unconscious processes and illuminate the complexity of group work. The next section will review the traditional orientations to study group work such as instrumentalism and humanistic psychology.

Traditional Orientations to Study Group Work

Foley (1992) maintains:

For around two decades the way adult educators look at teaching and group work has been dominated by a combination of an instrumentalism which assumes that teachers can control students’ learning, and a version of humanistic psychology which sees learning groups as fundamentally healthy and potentially self-directing organisms, and group leaders as facilitators of the emergence of natural, positive tendencies in groups. (p. 143)
Foley goes on to state that although these approaches to study group work have had progressive educational and social effects, there is a need to increase our understanding with an inclusion of approaches that reflect more of the complexity of group life.

Imel and Tisdell (1996) explore the effect that instrumentalism and humanistic psychology have had on adult education learning groups:

This instrumentalist and humanistic psychology approach that has been prevalent in the field of adult education has dealt with the issue of conflict in groups, primarily from the standpoint of how the facilitator can be supportive of individual group members, and thus the group as a whole, in order to help the group resolve conflict, move beyond it, and get on with the task functions.

According to this view, conflict is seen primarily as being generated from personality factors and differing life experiences among members. (p. 20)

An instrumentalist attitude has been applied to study group work, with educators believing that if they follow the appropriate set of steps then the outcomes will be successful. However, there are many factors, such as unconscious processes, that lie outside the control of the adult educator.

Foley (1992), Imel and Tisdell (1996) all agree that conflict resolved in a traditional manner leaves deeper problems unresolved. Psychic conflict, if attended to, can be used as a teaching and learning opportunity. Continued use of only traditional orientations to study group work allows adult educators to ignore the conflicts that are carried on at subtle levels. For example, although we may deny that we long for learners to like us, such unacknowledged wishes can compel us to react in ways that are inconsistent with our rational beliefs about good teaching.
Although there is an expanding interest in interpretive and critical frameworks that stress the significance of subjectivity in learning, adult education in general is still greatly influenced by positivism. The framework of positivism proposes that technical analysis can expose the reality of teacher-learner interactions and that by utilizing the appropriate application, educators can control learner motivation and behavior. This approach oversimplifies complex reality and fosters the concept that educators can and should control learning (Foley, 1992).

Much of the writing in the field of adult education is rooted in the work of Knowles and Rogers. This style postulates that adults know what they want to learn and how to direct their own learning. The teacher is viewed as a facilitator and his/her role is to provide the optimum conditions for learning. This particular style is very supportive and as Foley (1992) explains:

reflects the optimism of American culture, largely ignoring the unconscious and the existence of negative emotions in people and groups. But to deny the existence of the unconscious is to ignore important group phenomena. Groups do behave negatively and destructively. They also behave positively, rationally and creatively. Both tendencies are present in groups. Unlike Rogers’ theory, psychoanalytic explanations of group behavior account for this duality. (p. 150)

This section has examined the traditional and most commonly used orientations to group work in adult education. Although these approaches have merit they have overlooked aspects of the group that contain learning opportunities. The next section will offer a more detailed discussion of a psychodynamic perspective on adult learning groups.
Psychodynamic Orientation to Study Group Work

Psychodynamic psychology is based on the theory of psychoanalysis. Inherent in these theories are an assumption that there are different levels of consciousness and that our experiences are based on conflict that occurs in our psyche. In order to ward off conflict, we all make use of defense mechanisms in an effort to protect our sense of self and to protect ourselves from the emotional pain we experience. If an adult educator chooses to consider learning groups from the psychodynamic perspective then there is a critical assumption being made: Conflicting forces of which we may not be aware influence all of us. In addition, defense mechanisms will be used by group members in an effort to deal with conflicting forces.

The attitudes, values, and habits developed in the first group in a person’s life, the family, can strongly influence later behavior. Past relations, especially parent-child relations can be unconsciously transferred into group settings and other daily social relations at primarily an unconscious level. Groups are active systems that influence members individually and collectively. Gladding (1999) maintains:

Basically, people act differently in groups than they do by themselves. As a general rule, primary affiliation groups (i.e., those with which people most identify, such as a family or peers) exert greater pressure on individuals than secondary affiliation groups (i.e., those with which people least identify, such as city or confederation). (p. 44)

There are basic concepts and terms from psychology that underlie the foundation of psychoanalytic theory (Ringer, 2002). Making the unconscious more conscious through techniques such as free association, transference, and interpretation are generally
accepted. As I mentioned earlier, defense mechanisms, which are ways of protecting a person from being overwhelmed by anxiety, are used to help the individual cope (Gladding, 1999; Ringer, 2002). The psychological defense mechanisms that adult educators most commonly encounter and that I anticipate to be appear the most often in this study are:

- **Repression** The most basic of the defense mechanisms, repression is the unconscious exclusion of distressing or painful thoughts and memories. All other defense mechanisms make some use of repression.

- **Denial** In this process, a person refuses to see or accept any problem or troublesome aspect of life. Denial operates at the preconscious or conscious level. It is the preconscious level that this study will seek to spotlight.

- **Projection** Instead of stating what a person really thinks or feels, he or she attributes an unacceptable thought, feeling, or motive onto another.

- **Regression** When individuals are under stress, they often return to a less mature way of behaving.

- **Rationalization** This defense mechanism involves giving an “intellectual reason” to justify doing a certain action. The reason and the action are only connected in the person’s mind after the behavior has been completed.
Not only are the defense mechanisms that I just discussed the most commonly used they will also play a major part in the analysis of the research data.

This section has reviewed both the traditional and psychodynamic orientations to study group work. The next section will describe how the psychodynamic orientation to study group work has been used in adult education.

A Psychodynamic Orientation to the Study of Groups in Adult Education

Although a psychodynamic orientation to study group work has been recognized by adult educators, very few have emphasized this perspective as a means of instruction and development in the adult learning group. In the 1940s Bion made brilliant discoveries in the social psychology of groups. His creative approach led to the development of group therapy known as the Tavistock style (Hinshelwood, 1989, p. 229). Foley (1992) discusses Bion’s concepts which he believed were relevant to his work as an educator of adult educators. Foley contrasts Bion’s assumptions about groups with the humanistic style developed by Rogers. First it is important for the adult educator to understand that it is difficult yet necessary for groups to establish effective cooperation. “Second, a group has its own dynamic, which is quite different from the dynamics of the individual personalities which make up the group” (Foley, 1992, p. 150). This assumption makes it extremely important that the group leader work with the individual as he/she relates to the group processes and not with the individual separately. Finally, there is an assumption that each individual contains an unconscious consisting of repressed feelings and thoughts that stem from early experience.
Boyd (1989, 1991) and Dirkx (1998, 2000) have addressed this elusive way of learning that is manifest in the unconscious dimension of the group setting. Boyd’s work on small groups and transformative education focused on understanding the dynamics between the inner and outer world. He used the writings of Carl Jung on symbols and archetypes, Bion’s work on relating in groups, and Erikson’s theories on identity to develop a method to facilitate personal transformations within the setting of a small group.

The research on small groups that Boyd conducted serves to illustrate how group conditions can serve to activate psychic dilemmas from the past for group members. Boyd wrote a case study of a woman named Mary to represent how her participation in an adult group led to the emergence of a psychic dilemma for her and the group as a whole. In this particular study the existence of role manifestation was identified and interpreted through metaphor and archetype such as the Great Mother.

Dirkx has also addressed this more elusive way of learning that is manifest in the unconscious dimensions of the group. Dirkx co-authored a chapter in Boyd’s 1991 book entitled, *Personal Transformations in Small Groups: A Jungian Perspective*. More recently Dirkx has addressed transformative learning opportunities that are manifest through the use of symbols, myths, imagination, and fantasy.

In an article that argues in favor of including systematic attention to group process as an element in courses on the education of adults, Knights (1993) describes an adult education course that was influenced by the Tavistock approach to study group work. Although the approach deviated from the Tavistock model in some ways, Knights found that this approach “allowed us to address ambivalence, and which took unconscious
processes within its scope” (p. 186). Knights approach to study group work is an example of an adult educator who has used an alternative orientation to work done in groups.

Knights (1993) introduced the idea of transference in an educational experiment that he conducted at the Durham University of Adult and Continuing Education. Transference is “the notion that individuals and groups frequently import into a current situation elements of powerful situations from the past, and that they unconsciously set in motion a drama which re-enacts an experience from outside the here and now” (Knights, 1993, pp. 189-190). Educators and authority figures may find themselves particularly subject to the effects of transference. Knights’ (1993) admonition to adult educators is as follows, “But it is important not only to note the existence of this phenomenon and its powerful effects, but to work with it” (p. 190).

Knights (1993) reminds us that teachers are often subject to the effects of transference and sometimes find themselves imbued with the image of important others, even parents. He urges us to utilize this phenomenon as an “important analytical sensing device” to interpret what it may be saying about the group. He explains the importance of this function, “Part of the skill of a teacher or facilitator is to cultivate this sort of sensitivity, uncomfortable though it may be” (p. 190). In one of the adult learning groups that he facilitated, Knights perceives that he was symbolically “cast off” as the group leader so that the group could assert its autonomy. Some of the “belief and emotions concerning their learning environment” that were experienced by the group members were “phases of dependency, of disillusionment and fight, of escape from the task, and fantasies both about the omnipotence and the incompetence of the staff team” (p. 191).
In contrast to more traditional orientations to study group work, psychodynamic adult education means accepting the ambivalence that comes with tolerating our own conflicting desires. By accepting and attempting to understand these conflicting parts of our selves that we resist we can achieve more mature and productive ways to cope with the desires and fears. In turn this greater self-knowledge can enable us to tolerate and guide this same learning in our students. Fenwick (in press) outlines how this might look:

For example, educators can alert learners to the indications of inner conflict, and encourage learners to monitor and work through these for themselves: dreams and daydreams, odd ‘slips’ of speech, sudden unexplained thoughts or images, repeated behavioral patterns defying conscious choices, evidence of obsessions, odd coincidences, avoidance of things that would promote one’s conscious objectives, and so on. … Learners can be encouraged to accept whatever these psychic incidents reveal about oneself, then seek strategies to meet these inner needs in acceptable ways. (p. 114)

This section described the use of a psychodynamic orientation to study group work by adult educators. The next section will examine the most commonly rendered critiques of psychoanalytic theory.

Critiques of Psychoanalytic Theory

When psychoanalysis was originally developed by Sigmund Freud, it was thought to be a highly subversive discipline because of its central themes of sexuality and aggression. Lemma-Wright (1995) offers another explanation for the rebellion against psychoanalysis:
It undoubtedly posed a serious challenge to the belief in conscious thought as the ultimate datum of human experience by invoking the central idea that there are areas of our experience which are beyond our conscious awareness, but which nonetheless affect our behavior – from behind the scenes as it were. (p. 2)

Other criticisms that have been launched against psychoanalysis are that it is expensive in terms of time and money, irrelevant as a treatment method for the very sick and the socially disadvantaged, and that there is an absence of satisfactory data showing the effectiveness of the method (Lemma-Wright, 1995; Rabkin, 1970). Also, many feminists are angered by traditional Freudian theory because of the idea of penis envy and related concepts that paint an unflattering portrait of women (Ryan, 2001; Tong, 1998). Ryan (2001) maintains, “Psychoanalysis has frequently been dismissed as bourgeois, as highly culturally specific while purporting to be universal, and as anti-feminist” (p. 48).

Although critiques of psychoanalytic theory are abundant, I start from the assumption that this particular worldview has something valuable to offer to the field of adult education. Some of Freud’s basic ideas are relevant for those who work in or with groups; these basic concepts permeate not only our professional practices but also our daily interactions. Despite the challenges and the seriousness of the questions that have been raised by critics of psychoanalysis, it offers a way to look at adult learning which considers multiple perspectives and recognizes areas that are beyond our conscious awareness yet affect our behavior and learning.

This section has reviewed the critiques of psychoanalytic theory. The next section will review how psychoanalytic theory is being used in educational research and practice.
Psychoanalytic Theory and Education

Recently, psychoanalytic theory is enjoying a renaissance and is specifically being used to inform educational theory (Britzman, 1998; Fenwick, 2000, 2001; Ryan, 2001). Fenwick and Ryan apply the use of concepts from psychoanalytic theory to illuminate adult education practice. Britzman’s perspective addresses the use and non-use of psychoanalytic theory in education in general, especially K to 12 public school education.

In a discussion of the dominant approaches used in adult education to understand experiential learning, Fenwick (2001) presents the critiques of those approaches as, “managing adults’ experience.” “… focus on mental processing, the unproblematic view of identifiable ‘concrete’ experience, the assumption that individuals engage in and reflect upon their experiences as unitary independent selves, and the assumption that individuals are split from their contexts” (p. 1). In contrast, Fenwick (2001) characterizes the advantages of applying ideas from psychoanalytic theory to adult education practice, “The contribution of psychoanalytic theory to experiential learning is its demonstration of the limits of conscious reflection on lived experience” (p. 33). Often we assume that what happens in a group is primarily influenced by the way in which the group is set up and facilitated. However, much that happens in the group setting is beyond the control of the adult educator.

Britzman (1998) characterizes education as interference. In the development of the young student, the child’s internal world encounters interference from the external world of the educational process. The process of educating the student (external world) encounters interference from the internal world of the student. We notice the importance
of the interplay between the external and internal world in the comprehension of the one being understood. This perspective offers more complexity in terms of learning and consequently adult learning groups; complexity that cannot be predicted or controlled.

In an effort to cover predetermined learning objectives and content, an adequate analysis of the interaction of the individual within the structure of the group is often missing in traditional orientations to study group work. Such interactions are complex and not disposed to control by the educator. In contrast the psychodynamic orientation highlights the tension between the internal and external world of the learner and can provide the opportunity for learning at a broader and deeper level. This concluding section underscores that the most obvious understanding derived by using the psychodynamic orientation is that varied perspectives of the group experience must be recognized by considering not simply the external reality but a combination of the external and internal. As Britzman (1998) reminds us, “Neither internal nor external reality is simple” (p. 6).
CHAPTER 3
THE APPROACH

In this chapter I describe the research approach that was used to complete this study. The purpose of the study, as set forth in Chapter 1, “was to describe an adult learning group from a psychodynamic orientation. Particular attention was paid to the way in which external experiences, both past and present were internalized by the group members. Connections between present behavior and early internalized experiences were examined and linked to how the adult learner experienced the group.”

Conceptual Framework

This study was rooted in the psychological tradition, specifically in the tradition of psychodynamic psychology. “The shared starting point of all the different schools of psychoanalytic thought is this idea of a dynamic unconscious which defends against anxiety and significantly influences people’s actions, lives and relations” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 19). Consequently, four key notions that influenced this study were (a) behavior is dynamic and motivated by internal forces, (b) behavior is affected by past internalized experiences, (c) behavior is influenced by the presence of unconscious processes, and (d) behavior involves the use of defense mechanisms to ward off anxiety against perceived threats.

This psychodynamic framework enters into the study in two principle ways. First, it enters into the data collection through the narrative of the participant, through my own subjectivities, and through the dynamics created by the meshing of the participant’s
narratives and my subjectivities. Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein’s (1986) clinical work and investigations reflect how the self is shaped from unconscious defenses against anxiety. Klein breaks from the assumption that the self is a single unit, with unproblematic boundaries separating it from the external world of objects (both people and things). Her argument is that these defenses against anxiety are intersubjective, that is, they come into play in relations between people (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Thus I assumed that every communication between researcher and researched, and most human interactions, are set up to defend us from anxiety and protect our own sense of identity.

Often data collected for analysis in a qualitative study is taken at face value. The task of many qualitative analyses is simple summarization of the words as the interviewee related them; researchers frequently did this in the spirit of giving people voice. However, accepting what people say at face value is a naïve approach to the data and something that is not done in everyday life. The belief that the interviewee is ‘telling it like it is’ works on the assumption that people are telling you what is “real” without contemplation of the interpersonal dynamics of trust between the interviewer and interviewee. What we said and did in the interaction did not stem solely from the ‘real’ relationship but was “mediated by internal fantasies which derive from our histories of significant relationships. Such histories are often accessible only through our feelings and not through our conscious awareness” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 45).

Consequently, I began with the assumption that each group member had an identity investment in her positioning in the group experience dialogue. The “defended subject” concept as described by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) was used to explore why
the group members invested in certain discourses rather than others. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) explain their theory of the defended subject:

This argument assumes that threats to the self create anxiety, and indeed this is a fundamental proposition in psychoanalytic theory, where anxiety is viewed as being inherent in the human condition. For psychoanalysis, anxiety precipitates defences against the threats it poses to the self and these operate at a largely unconscious level. (p. 19)

Various methods are represented and effectively used within qualitative research. However, given my assumption that unconscious defenses affect the information that is produced in the research relationship and the way in which the information is interpreted, I incorporated the idea of the defended subject into my use of a narrative method. The interview strategy I used was based upon a method that is described by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). They borrowed the strategy from the biographical-interpretative method first developed by German sociologists to produce accounts of the lives of holocaust survivors and Nazi soldiers. The main theoretical principle is the idea that there is a “Gestalt (a whole which is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda) informing each person’s life which it is the job of biographers to elicit intact, and not destroy through following their own concerns” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 34).

Consequently, my strategy for eliciting narratives was based on four principles that facilitate the production of the research participant’s meaning-frame. The four principles are:

- Use open-ended not closed questions.
- Elicit stories.
• Avoid why questions.
• Follow up using the interviewees’ ordering and phrasing.

Semi-structured core interview questions (see appendices) were used to elicit stories from the group participants. The nature of the interviews were conversational and the core interview questions served as prompts to elicit stories about current, past, and family group experiences.

The second way in which psychodynamic psychology entered into this study was during data analysis. I assert that psychodynamics are constantly at work but the presence of psychodynamic behavior is more accessible during episodes of tension. In my analysis I used conceptual tools from psychology that enabled me to attribute individual manifestations to deeper psychological meanings in which the participant was not always aware.

The type of dialogue that the participant engaged in was a key factor in data analysis. In order to discern patterns within the participants’ dialogue, multiple interviews were necessary in order to retrieve a holistic picture. I prepared a separate interview guide for each person based on the dialogue that was present in the previous interview. The process of being attentive to the participant’s narrative plus reading and re-reading the data allowed patterns of behavior and attitudes to emerge. The patterns emerged through a reading of the transcripts in a holistic manner without breaking the data down. This holistic reading and analysis was essential in order to reveal the psychology of the participant. After the patterns emerged a psychological concept or tool was used to gain a deeper understanding of the participant’s psychological motivation. The psychological tools that were most helpful in understanding the participants, in this study were: denial,
regression, transference, resistance/avoidance, reaction formation, dependency, and idealization.

In this study, in addition to the assumption that both researcher and researched were defended subjects, the group member was posited as a psychosocial subject who could not be understood without knowledge of her *external* experiences and how her *internal* world interpreted and made meaning of the external experiences. The intersubjective dynamics that occurred between the participants and myself, both during data collection and analysis, was also a factor in arriving at a holistic understanding of this particular adult learning group. Although rooted in psychology, one of the virtues of a psychodynamic perspective is that it allows a more complete, richer, and deeper picture of the learning group to emerge.

Exploring adult learning groups from a psychodynamic orientation required appropriate research methodology. A qualitative case study was used to search for an understanding of how the same group experience affected the learning of different participants in unique ways. “The goal of a case study is holistic description and interpretation” (Merriam and Simpson, 2000, p. 108). I used the case study approach to go beyond description and used theory to provide insights into the importance of the group members’ biographies and their inner world in understanding their experience of the group.

**Research Procedures**

Data collection and analysis spanned an eight-month period overall and consisted of three major steps: sample selection, data collection, and data analysis. Each of the three steps is developed in the following sections.
Sample Selection

Sample selection in qualitative research is intended to choose participants who can provide significant and essential information concerning the issues of primary importance to the study. Merriam and Simpson (2000) maintain, “Sample selection in qualitative research is purposeful. Since you are interested in the in-depth understanding of those who know the most (rather than the average opinion of the many), you select a purposeful sample” (p. 99-100). I wanted to locate a group that had between three and five adults engaged in an educational enterprise that required the completion of a project within a specified deadline. Ultimately, a graduate level group enrolled in an allied health program at a nearby university served as the sample for this study.

Sample size is often a debated topic in research studies. Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) state, “So, usually ‘case study’ refers to research that investigates a few cases, often just one, in considerable depth” (p. 3). In addition, Gomm et al. (2000) discuss the goal of the case study by stating, “It is sometimes argued that the aim of case study research should be to capture cases in their uniqueness, rather than to use them as a basis for wider generalization or for theoretical inference of some kind” (p. 3).

The starting point for this study was the fact that group work, as an instructional strategy, is an established feature of American adult education. As I began to make a decision for the sample, I set myself certain criteria. I needed a group that was small in order to deal with the data analysis in enough depth to capture the psychodynamic aspect of the study. Yet I knew that it could not be so small that I would not be able to register the interplay between group and personal experience. Consequently, a group of three adults engaged in an educational enterprise allowed me to observe the dynamics that
captured a more complete picture of the group experience. Each participant met the criteria for being an adult. The actual participants were all over the age of twenty-one, and married, although at this time in their lives they are full-time students.

The sample group was involved in a task that required intense interaction - the task-oriented group was similar to the one that engendered my interest in this topic. The group, as a whole, was responsible for the completion of a project within a timeline that specified a deadline. Another consideration was whether the project on which the group was working would result in a product at the end, rather than a discussion or a book group. I chose a group with a product orientation because I believed it would create a high stake situation where meaningful group interaction was observed. If there was no product attached, it was possible for group members to opt out of the discussion. A group that was working toward the completion of a product under a specified deadline emphasized accomplishment and efficiency in completing the identified finished product. Based partially on my own experience in groups and as described in Chapter One, I know that one of the things that brought conflict and psychodynamic forces into focus was a task at the end.

Ultimately I did locate a group that met these criteria. It was a group of allied health professionals working on a group thesis in a private university in the southeastern U.S. The research participants for this study were identified by recommendation of a colleague. The sample consisted of 3 female adult students who were working as a group to complete a project by a prescribed deadline. They completed and defended a thesis in order to satisfy degree completion requirements.
Gender balance was not a criterion for the group, and, this sample was comprised of all women. This is simply noted without any speculation of whether it would have been different if it were a mixed group. Two group members were in their late twenties and one member was 22 years of age. All three group members are married and one has children.

The work facing this group was the completion of a thesis. The group began working together in the fall of 2002 and completed their degree requirements in the spring of 2003. In January 2003, the group members collected data to use in the completion of their thesis project. Next, they analyzed, wrote and defended the findings as a group. The thesis process was completed in April 2003.

*Descriptions of Individual Participants*

Each of the three participants in this study was an adult by virtue of the fact that each is married, one with children, and each assumes the day to day responsibilities of adulthood. Each participant is described in Table 3.0 and below. Because I used a holistic approach when analyzing the data, perspectives and impressions provided by the thesis supervisor were useful in the development of the study. Therefore, she is described in the narrative portion of this section. However, the study participants are described in both the table and narrative. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

*Julia.* Julia is a 30 year old white female from a southern state in the United States. Julia has two children, a daughter who is 9 and a son age 6. She has a sister who is an identical twin and one brother who is 5 years younger. Julia has “this strong feeling that if you are going to have children you need to be the one to take care of them and not
the day care.” She tries to correlate her school schedule with her children’s school
schedule so that they are in after school care as little as possible.

Table 3.0

*Description of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Julia is thirty years old and married with two children. She married right out of high school at the age of 18. She has a daughter nine years old and a six year old son. Julia has a twin sister and a younger brother. Julia is a full-time student and believes it is important to schedule her academic responsibilities so that she may be at home with her two children as much as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Kate is twenty-two and has been married for one year. She has one older sister who is married with two young children. Most of Kate’s family lives within close proximity of her parents who own a family business. Kate is a full time student and helps her parents out with the family business when needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee</td>
<td>Renee is twenty four, has been married for a year and a half and doesn’t have children. She has an older brother who she greatly admires and who owns a business. Renee’s parents are retired and work for her brother at his business. Renee is a full time student and works a couple of days a week at her brother’s landscape business.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Julia’s early school experience was in a public school setting. In her junior year of high school her grades were good enough that she was allowed to finish her senior level coursework a year ahead of time. Julia’s motivation to finish high school a year early was so that she could get married. She graduated in 1990 at the age of 17 and she married in 1990. Her parents divorced when she was around 16 and she got married at 18 years old.

After Julia’s children were born she stayed home with them and then worked at an accounting firm and an insurance company. When it seemed as though she was not going
to be able to enroll in an allied health program, Julia went to a nearby university for training to become a teacher. She went one semester and decided this was not what she really wanted to do. So when Julia’s twin sister was accepted into the health care program where my study was conducted in a neighboring southern state, Julia and her husband “moved from ________ to ________ so that I (Julia) could go to school.”

Kate. Kate is a 22 year old white female from a southern state. She has been married for 1 year to a man who is 10 years her senior and that she met at church. They don’t have children yet but she would like to have children before her husband turns 35. She has one sister, Jessica, who is 5 years older and married with two young children. Jessica and her family live behind Kate’s parent’s house. “Then down the road is my grandma and then the next house is my aunt and across the pasture is my mom’s sister.” Kate has a big family. Her father has a lot of acreage and Kate and her husband have plans to build a house “over there.” Kate’s father is a business owner. The business is located at the family’s house and Kate and her family helps out with the family business.

Kate went to public school in a small school system. She graduated from high school in 1998 with “about 114 other people.” After high graduation she immediately enrolled in a nearby college that she attended for 2 years. She then transferred to another nearby university for a semester and “figured out what I wanted to do.” The following semester she transferred back to the first college that she had attended for 2 years. In the summer of 2000, she was accepted in the masters program at the university where this study is being conducted.

Renee. Renee is a 24 year old white female from a southern state. She has been married for a year and a half and has no children. Her husband is a millwright. She has a
brother, Tommy, who is three years older that Renee describes as “unbelievable.”

Tommy has one daughter whose is 2 years old. He is 28 and owns a million-dollar landscaping company that “he started from scratch.” Renee describes Tommy as being “very serious about his work.” Tommy has been influential in Renee’s life. She began playing soccer at 5 because Tommy played soccer. However, when it comes to work, Renee says that her priorities are different than Tommy’s. Her husband and her dog are a huge priority and she strives to maintain balance between school, work, and family. Her parents are retired and work for her brother and Renee works for him part time.

Renee went to a Methodist affiliated private school until her eighth grade year. After eighth grade she attended an Episcopalian affiliated private school. During her high school years she worked at a teacher supply store. She attended college in another southern state where she graduated with a degree in exercise sports science.

Dr. Smith. Dr. Smith, the thesis supervisor, is in her early to mid 50’s and married to a professor at a nearby university. She has a doctorate degree and is the department chair of the allied health program at the university where my three study participants are enrolled. She is also the sample’s thesis supervisor and is directing the development and completion of their master’s thesis. She is experienced in the supervision of the thesis process, was clear in articulating the process, and has directed several thesis groups in the past.

She described the group as task oriented and “matured as a group.” She described Julia as a hard worker and a perfectionist, Kate as rural but sophisticated, with a “can do attitude” who is “turned on by research,” and Renee as “very bright” and “a solid performer.” She also stated that Renee’s “affect is harder to read.”
Dr. Smith is a respected practitioner and thinker who has written professional and academic manuscripts in this particular allied health area. She has a “very strong personality.” Dr. Smith says that, “I just sort of came out of the womb that way. I really did, I have a very strong personality.”

Data Collection

I used three methods of data collection: interview, observation, and document analysis. The data collection events, purpose, and timing are outlined in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1

Data Collection Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>To gather contextual data.</td>
<td>Week 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>To obtain a historical perspective of the group.</td>
<td>Week 2 and 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>To gather supplemental data.</td>
<td>Week 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>To obtain perspective about earlier group experiences and possibly to clarify information from observation.</td>
<td>Week 6 and 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>To gather supplemental data.</td>
<td>Week 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 3</td>
<td>To obtain information about the participants’ earliest family group experiences.</td>
<td>Week 9 and 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>Triangulation and secondary source of data.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because this group had worked together for several months, it was important to gain a historical perspective of the group, which included the make up, purpose, and general environment in the group (refer to Appendix). Psychodynamic theory asserts
that the present is influenced by the past, so it was important to know the historical background of each group member. Consequently, in the final interview, I asked about the participants’ early family group experiences (refer to Appendice).

I observed the group during three work sessions. After the work sessions I conducted an interview with each group member to discuss my observations of the group and gain a perspective of earlier groups in which the participant had been involved (Refer to Appendice). Because I was trying to bring up the particular history of the individual, specific questions were asked about concrete incidents wherever possible.

I audiotaped the interview sessions and transcribed the interviews as soon as possible after completion of the interview. The transcripts and interview tapes are kept in a secure location. The participants’ real name was replaced by a pseudonym in order to conceal her identity.

The second data collection method I used was observation. “Because participants are frequently unaware of their behavior, having to recall or recount the past is not as productive as observing the behavior directly” (Merriam and Simpson, 2000, p. 154). Since developmental phases are a component of learning groups, it was important for me to observe group meetings as well as seek a historical perspective of the group from the members and the supervisors. Learning groups continue to evolve and can be conceptualized as forever forming, with certain issues returning from time to time to be explored in greater depth. Some of the issues that groups continually struggle with are anxiety, power, norms, interpersonal relationships, and personal growth (Gladding, 1999, p. 104). During the observations I tape-recorded the sessions so that a richer database was retrievable.
The third data collection method used was document analysis. The documents consisted of printed and electronic material relevant to the study and to the thesis project that the group completed. I gathered supporting data from the group supervisor and other faculty members who have worked with this group. In this study, document analysis was largely done in order for me to understand the tasks that group members actually faced and the context in which they worked. The documents had little direct impact on the findings but a major impact on my understanding of the context in which the group worked.

Data Preparation and Analysis

Data analysis is a systematic process of making sense out of the data. The process involves systematically “searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field, notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 157). Rather than using a code and retrieve method to analyze the unstructured qualitative data, an analysis method based on the principle of working with the whole data and paying attention to links, inconsistencies, and contradictions within that whole was used.

As I read the interview transcript material both the parts and whole were kept in mind. The supporting information gathered from the supervisor of the group members, document analysis, and what the participants say about each other was used to gain an understanding of the larger whole. “To grasp a person through the ‘whole’ of what we know about him or her does not have to imply that he or she is consistent, coherent or rational” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, pg. 70). Consequently, important information
about the group member and her experience in the group was gained through contradictions and inconsistencies that appeared in the data.

My data analysis was dependent upon interpretation on my part through the use of psychodynamic concepts. Because the theoretical framework guiding the study is psychodynamic, it is important to note the differences between the use of interpretation in the clinical setting as opposed to this research setting. Hollway and Jefferson explain:

The primary difference between the two practices is that clinicians interpret into the encounter, whereas researchers will save their interpretations for outside it. Put another way, researchers, not being therapists, will be careful not to interpret at the time the information is being provided by the interviewees. Their interpretative work comes later, is separate from the participant and has a different audience. (p. 77)

Throughout the analysis my interpretations are supported with details from the data sources.

I used reflexivity and deployed my own subjectivity and memory of the meeting with the participant to illuminate the analysis of the research data. Biographical similarities and shared cultural assumptions between the research participant and myself enhanced my perception and analysis. My subjective knowledge of life as a southern female, in the field of education, and as someone experienced in educational groups assisted my interpretation of the participant’s account. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) maintain, “Using reflexivity is not a substitute for utilising theory. But, …, it can strengthen a theoretical conviction or alert us to a misreading” (p. 67).
Objectivity, Subjectivity, Intersubjectivity

Fundamental to this research is the notion that there is not a single objective reality. Instead the research approach I used embraces the notion of many truths, each of them subjectively perceived and anchored within our experiences, some conscious but some also unconscious. Therefore, in this study, notions of objectivity have no power; however, notions of subjectivity were carefully considered.

The group, in some ways, shared an experience. That is, they were physically in the same room, doing the same tasks; however, the subjective experiences varied significantly. While the participant was interviewed, each person’s subjective account was captured on tape as they said it. However, another level of subjectivity entered into this research and that was the subjectivity of the researcher. It entered into the study in two notable places, both in data collection and data analysis. In the data collection process when I was most aware of my subjectivity, it was noted in my researcher’s journal. In the data analysis, my subjectivity was most evident in my perspective of the episodes of tension.

The purpose of observation, in this study, was not to recreate a realist ethnography in the fashion of Spradley (1970). I conducted observations in order to enhance my familiarity with the setting and the research participants. Observation gave me a starting point with which to join my research participants as they recreated the experience filtered through their own subjectivity.

My subjectivity was evident through my own experience with groups as well as in strong feelings that may surface during the interviews and in notes from the researcher journal. The narratives that were collected were the result of a relationship between the
interviewer and the research participant. Based on the conceptual framework described earlier in this chapter, both the researcher and the researched were subject to projections and introjections of ideas and feelings coming from others. The impression we had of each other was not totally derived from the real relationship but was influenced by our history of significant relationships. Consequently, my feelings in and around the interviews were of value in understanding the dynamics of the research relationship and the importance of these dynamics in the production of data.

I see the researcher’s subjectivity here not as a limitation but instead as an inevitable reality of all research. I examined my own subjectivities as I was writing about other people, their subjectivities, and their experiences. As an example, here is a passage of findings from a pilot study that I did:

*The behavior that a group member displays, especially in stressful situations, may be repeated from past family interactions and experience within the family system.*

*M My own family experience leads me to withdraw in group settings where conflict becomes intense. Rita struggled with being able to find solid “ground” to stand upon. Another group member explained that his own family encouraged assertiveness and direct engagement when conflict surfaced. His behavior and reaction to the conflict that occurred in the research group was much different from Rita’s reaction and my reaction. Rita and I believe that learning stopped on the evenings where conflict was openly hostile in the group. The conflict felt hostile to me, however, another group member has stated that he does not believe the conflict was hostile but healthy.*
Qualitative research is founded on the fundamental assumption that reality is constructed by the individual, is subjective, multiple, and ever changing. Based on this assumption, the qualitative researcher attempted to reveal the participants’ interpretation of their world. Therefore, this qualitative researcher owns the existence of researchers’ biases in collecting and interpreting the data. Peshkin (1988) states that researchers should “systematically seek out their subjectivity while their research is actively in progress” making an effort to “be aware of how their subjectivity may be shaping their inquiry and its outcomes” (p. 17).

My belief in the role of defenses against anxiety in mediating our relationship to reality and the importance of unconscious intersubjectivity influenced this study. It was also my belief that temperament, life experiences, particularly early family experiences, and unconscious processes blend to influence the nature of each individual. However, it is important to emphasize that it is a preconscious level of the unconscious that was uncovered in this study as opposed to a deeper level of unconscious accessed by trained professionals in a therapeutic setting.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from a qualitative case study that was guided by the following research objectives:

(1) to describe an adult learning group from a psychodynamic orientation.

(2) to understand how the internal world of group members influenced group interaction.

(3) to explore connections between past experiences and present behavior that affected the group member’s experience of the group.

Synopsis of Methodology

The graduate students who participated in this study were interviewed over a period of three months. The interviews took place on the campus of the school where the students were enrolled in a graduate level allied health program. The three participants were working as a group to complete a master’s thesis for their program of study. Each participant was interviewed individually on three different occasions and each interview lasted approximately one hour. The group’s thesis supervisor was interviewed on one occasion. The interview lasted approximately one hour. She and I also had several informal conversations about the group. In addition, I conducted three observations of group work sessions and one planning session with the three group members and the thesis supervisor.
After each interview session, I transcribed and conducted a preliminary analysis of the transcript. When a series of interviews had been conducted with the three participants and transcriptions were complete, I met with my major professor to discuss the data. Emerging themes from the transcripts were used to craft the interview guide for the upcoming interviews.

Interview questions that prompted reflection on the part of the group participant, about recent psychological tension and experiences from the participant’s past, were asked in an effort to both illuminate the internal world of the participant and provide information that allowed me to make connections between present behavior and past experiences. Manifestation of psychological tension, such as a tense exchange between group members, was an indicator of disequilibrium within the group. For the purposes of this manuscript, I chose four notable examples of psychological tension or disequilibrium that clearly demonstrated the research objectives of the study and are discussed in this chapter.

Evolution of the Analysis

I began the analysis with a belief that all human actions are driven by psychodynamic forces and a commitment to approach my data inductively. For the most part, this was a group of mature students who worked in a collaborative mode with little open conflict and tension; consequently, it was necessary for me to break through the superficial interactions of the group in order to answer the research objectives. During the first observation of a group work session, both obvious and subtle psychological tension was present. These points of psychological tension gave me access to the
psychodynamic lens that I used to interpret the data in this study; however, other explanations and ways of interpreting the data are possible.

Although psychological tension within this group may have been subtle, it was present. The episodes of psychological tension were used as entry points to gain access to the participant’s internal world through the use of semi-structured interview questions. By episode, I do not necessarily mean something that is tightly time bound. Episode was defined by a series of interactions or self-revelations that demonstrated multiple perspectives to the same experience.

As I read and re-read the transcripts, field notes, and researcher journal, it was somewhat disconcerting to think that, if all actions are shaped by psychodynamic forces, all data were relevant to the research purpose. The nuance in expression that is not emphasized in other analytic approaches can be dramatically meaningful from a psychodynamic perspective. Consequently, it was difficult to pare down the psychological tension yet still maintain the holistic form that is essential when using this particular analytic approach.

I found myself strongly drawn to certain episodes in the data, while other data seemed somewhat unimportant. The episodes I was drawn to were those in which the presence of psychodynamic forces was more obvious than others. In those episodes, what brought these forces into view was the psychological tension or disequilibrium that played out in the group. When there was psychological tension in the group, people revealed feelings and reacted in ways that seemed to be emblematic of their psychodynamically patterned personalities. Consequently, I decided to focus the analysis on episodes of tension or disequilibrium. Because of the small size and intimacy of the
group, such incidents usually revealed the psychodynamic reactions for each of the three
group members. Ultimately, the findings for this study are drawn primarily from four
complex episodes of tension. It is my judgment that, although psychodynamic forces
were at work throughout the interactions recorded on my audiotapes and in my
transcripts, these four exemplify the ways in which psychodynamic forces drive
individuals and the groups in which they interact.

This approach to analysis has one potential drawback. Because I chose to focus on
points of tension, the psychodynamic aspects that I dealt with the most have a somewhat
“negative” cast. That is I highlight the times when the group experienced interpersonal
tension rather than those times when the group experienced interpersonal harmony.

Four Significant Episodes That Illustrate the Psychodynamic
Realities of Group-Based Learning

The four examples that portray the objectives of this study are discussed in the
next section. These examples represent episodes, which illustrate where group members
displayed psychological tension and disequilibrium. The episodes include an assortment
of forms, span a variety of different time frames, but each case involves all the
participants and they are revealing about the psychodynamics both of individuals and of
the group as a whole. I will talk about what the episode revealed about each group
participant. The effect these episodes had on each person will be revealed through
narratives that allowed me access to their inner world. This in turn enabled me to explore
connections that were made between the person’s current behavior and their past
experiences. However, sometimes those connections were made and acknowledged by
the participant but sometimes they were not. As a matter of fact, in Episode #4 I made the connection rather than the participants. The four episodes are depicted in Table 4.0

In table 4.0 the four episodes that illuminate the objectives of the study are named. On the left hand side of the table, the episode number and name are listed as it will appear in the text. Next to each episode name and number is a summary or short description of the episode.

Table 4.0 Four Significant Episodes that Illustrate the Psychodynamic Realities of the Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episode Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Episode #1: The Group Reacted to a Symbolic Picture</td>
<td>A tense exchange between group members, about a picture, served as a snapshot of group interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode #2: The Group was Frozen in the Face of Authority</td>
<td>The three group members experienced a pivotal person as intimidating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode #3: The Group was Disabled by Anxiety</td>
<td>Anxiety around thesis related obstacles impeded the group’s ability to problem solve and think critically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episode #4: How the Group Depicted Itself</td>
<td>The group members were invested in a conflict-free group image. Narratives, by the group members, revealed that the group was not conflict-free.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next section, each of the four episodes begins with background information that provides a context for the reader. In addition, an analytical description of the episode is shown in the form of a table. On the left side of the table, under Observed Behavior, the participant’s pseudonym is listed followed by her direct quote as it appears in the original transcript. Then, on the right side of the table is the underlying subtext of the quote, labeled Psychodynamic Interpretation. The episode and subtext are discussed as it relates to each group member and the group as a whole.
Episode #1: The Group Reacted to a Symbolic Picture

A feedback session with the group’s thesis supervisor had just ended. The three group members were now ready to begin a work session. The group often met in this room at the university library. This was the first work session following Christmas break.

Before Christmas break, the group members defended their thesis proposal. The purpose of this particular feedback session, with the thesis supervisor, was to review revisions that were necessary before moving forward with the thesis project. When the supervisor left, the group began working on the needed revisions.

Table 4.1 Analytical Description of Episode #1: The Group Reacted to a Symbolic Picture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Behavior</th>
<th>Researcher’s Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julia said to Kate: “By the way, you’ve never shown me pictures of your nephew.”</td>
<td>Julia was communicating that Kate’s behavior made her feel overlooked and slighted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia implied that Kate had shown the picture to others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate responded: “You never asked.”</td>
<td>Kate denied the slight, and attributed the outcome to Julia’s lack of proactivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia replied: “I don’t think some of the other people asked that you’ve voluntarily shown them to.”</td>
<td>Julia reasserted the slight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate responded: “Yeah they did. I figured you were mad at me for some reason.”</td>
<td>Kate again denied the slight, and blamed the outcome on Julia’s feeling state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia: “I was having a bad day yesterday and it didn’t have anything to do with you. I had a lot on my mind. I thought you were mad at me because you didn’t show me the picture.”</td>
<td>Julia confessed psychological turbulence but then placed the responsibility for not having seen the picture back on Kate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee stated: “Girls, girls, girls.”</td>
<td>Renee diminished tension by equating the exchange to unimportant juvenile bickering. Renee sought to keep conflict down and emotionally control the group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The group members focused on the task at hand, encountering a few minor interruptions. All three members participated equally in the distribution of work. Toward the end of the work session a tense exchange, that was unrelated to the thesis project, occurred and is described in the next section.

*What Episode #1 Revealed About Julia*

Julia felt that she had been slighted and left out because Kate had not shown her pictures of her newborn nephew. She believed that others had seen the picture without having asked; she believed Kate had volunteered the picture to others but not to her. The picture symbolized a connection to Kate of which Julia was not a part. Julia positioned herself as having been left out, slighted, and not connected. Data from interviews and observations reveal this as a consistent behavior of Julia’s.

In addition to the picture incident, Julia related another time when she did not feel connected to the group. In response to being asked, “How do you feel the other group members value you in your current group?” Julia responded by saying:

*I think you were here last time and I had made a suggestion and it kind of got overlooked. And then one of the other group members made the same suggestion and it was a really good idea then and then I came forward and said, you know, I just had the same suggestion. Sometimes I feel like, I don’t know if it’s just – we’re just so busy doing everything that we just don’t hear what everybody has to say or not. But um, you know, I’ve made several suggestions for the thesis if I thought we needed to change things or this that and the other. And um I think they pretty much value what I have to say, most of the time.*
Julia clearly felt that, at times, her voice was not being heard within the group. The last sentence in Julia’s narrative above indicated ambiguity through the use of hedging language, (e.g., I think, pretty much, most of the time) regarding how much the other group members valued her.

Being connected was important to Julia as was evidenced from a comment that was made in my researcher’s journal after the second observation of a work session:

*Julia is the most attentive to me, she makes sure to include me, she tries to clarify things for me, when I ask questions she stays with me and gets the information to make sure I have a complete answer to my question.*

Julia told me that she talked on the phone several times a day with her twin sister and talked to her mom “all the time.” This was another clue that she liked to stay connected.

My plan for the third interview was to explore the connection between Julia’s feelings of not being heard with an early life experience. Consequently, I asked Julia if there was a connection between the incident in the thesis group and anything that happened to her in her early years. Julia replied:

*In my family situation, I mean, everything that any of us ever said as children have always seemed to be important to my parents so that never happened in that situation. I think I was a shy and timid child when I was growing up. I can think back to elementary school and I don’t know if I wasn’t speaking out so therefore wasn’t being heard or afraid to speak out but I can remember instances where it seemed like I was being ignored by some of the other kids. I don’t remember a particular incident but I just recall things like that happening with people that were supposed to be my friends.*
The narrative above provided an example from Julia’s past when she did not feel heard in a way that was similar to the present experience. She stated that she was always heard in her family but not in her circle of classmates. She described being ‘shy and timid’ as a youngster. There is a note of cynicism in her description of ‘people that were supposed to be my friends’ that implied she felt betrayed. Not being heard was a recurring theme in Julia’s life.

*What Episode #1 Revealed About Kate*

Kate was the most defended participant both in the study and Episode #1. Her quick response to Julia, ‘You never asked’ was meant to shut down the dialogue around the picture. When Julia continued the dialogue, Kate then switched to avoidance behavior by stating, ‘I figured you were mad at me for some reason’. The avoidance behavior that she displayed by changing the subject from the picture to Julia’s feeling state, was typical behavior for Kate. Consciously, or unconsciously, I am not sure which, she was unwilling to engage in conversation that might make her uncomfortable or that was sensitive to discuss.

Kate was reluctant to talk except on a superficial level. It was not unusual for her to reply to an interview question by stating, “I don’t know. Tough question.” When asked to make connections or give examples, it was not uncommon for her to reply, “I can’t think of any right off hand” or “But specific instances, I can’t think of any.” The following comment from my researcher’s journal is an example of my impression of Kate that was recorded during the second month of the study after the second interview:

> After the first interview, honestly, I wondered if Kate wasn’t being stubborn because she’s so resistant to self-reveal. She’s quick to say I don’t know. Or
answer with a no or yes and not give much detail. Initially I thought she might be
determined that I wasn’t going to get any information from her but after the
second interview, I think that it’s simply that she’s not very reflective. I think she’s
bright, a nice girl, she’s likeable, but I don’t think she’s prone to introspection
and reflection.

Kate’s defensiveness was surprising because she gave the impression of being the
most outspoken. Her defensiveness and resistance showed up in the length of time that it
took to transcribe her interviews. The average interview with Kate took between four to
four and one-half hours to transcribe. The interviews with the other participants took
between five and one-half to six hours to transcribe. As was revealed in Episode #1
Kate’s responses were also briefer than the other two participants.

Although Kate was very quick to say that there was not conflict in
her family or thesis group, there was evidence that her pattern of avoidance around
conflict was part of her early life experience. She talked about one past experience that
happened when her family was working as a group. In order to avoid work she made
numerous trips to the mailbox to check for the mail. The second incident is described
below:

Like when you were little you fought about dumb things when you look back on
them as an older person. And I didn’t like onions. And my sister was responsible
for making the spaghetti or whatever and she would chop up some onions and put
in there. So I didn’t like it but I’d just pick them out. So that was that.
Kate said that she tried to “avoid conflict” in most cases when she was young. She talked about the development of her assertiveness skills, especially since enrolling in the graduate program at Wheaton and since getting married.

*What Episode #1 Revealed About Renee*

I had the opportunity to discuss the exchange described in Episode #1 with Renee during the first interview. The opportunity arose when Renee described the thesis group by saying, “Plus our personalities fit together pretty well.” She described herself as “a bit of a perfectionist but I’m pretty laid back at the same time.” When I asked for an example of what she meant, Renee said:

> In our group I would say that Kate is the one who voices her opinion the most. Julia is shy and she’s going to hang back. And I’m just kind of whatever works best. I don’t like conflict. I know there’s been times when other members need to speak up more than they do and not sit back.

I then asked, “When you say ‘other members need to speak up more than they do and not sit back,’ what does that mean?” Renee replied:

> Like there’s sometimes say Kate has an opinion and she’ll voice it and maybe Julia will give an opinion also and they’re different but sometimes one may be overlooked and I don’t know. I’m also, they call me the mediator. So if there is something, a conflict, then I do have to step up sometimes and say OK, well, which way are we going to do it. But there are also times when I just kind of let things go if I feel there’s a little tension ‘cause I don’t like conflict.

I then reminded Renee of the exchange, described in Episode #1 that occurred during my first observation. Renee stated:
Yeah. Lots of times she [Julia] gets her feelings hurt very easily. I've had many talks with her – she’s got to just stand up for herself and speak up. I don’t know if it’s because they were good friends to begin with and working together maybe brings in a little tension. I know if I get phone calls from one and then she doesn’t call the other one – the other one says, “Well why didn’t she call me?” From both sides I get that so I don’t know. They get along well but there’s a little tension but I think it’s more personal tension than group related.

In Episode #1, Renee took on the group maintenance role of harmonizer or conciliator. Gladding (1999) describes the function of a group member in this role by saying, “these are group mediators who seek to keep conflict down and emotionally control the group. They are afraid of the group getting out of hand emotionally” (p. 61).

I asked Renee if there had been times earlier in her life when she felt she was in the middle or had to take a side. She replied, “No ‘cause I’ve always wanted to take a side in my family, obviously. As a parent I’ve always wanted to take my mom’s side.” I then asked, “Did you not get into the middle of it?” To which Renee stated, “No, I really didn’t get into the middle of it. I was more scared to get in the middle of it than anything. So no I guess I really didn’t take sides. I wanted to - but I didn’t.”

Although Renee might have been scared to get in the middle between Mom and Dad when she was very young, it is clear that she was indirectly involved, as she became older. In the following excerpt she talks about how her mom reacts to her dad’s anger.

Usually leaves him be. I don’t know, she’s getting better and she’s sticking up for herself more now, which is good, I talked her into doing that. They used to go
months without even speaking because of my father. But supposedly he’s working on that too.

Renee said she did not want to get in the middle, however, indirectly she did take a stand with the thesis group. Her stand was revealed by her response when asked if she consciously took a neutral stand.

Yes, I do. Because I don’t want to be in the middle, I don’t want to take a side.

And they both know that. Julia even calls and says I don’t want you to get mad if I tell you something and that’s fine but I try and look at it from both sides. ‘Cause she was upset about those pictures, I asked to look at them, you just have to speak up and ask. Don’t get upset because she just forgot to show you.

There is a parallel between the way that Renee interacted with her parents and the way she interacted with the thesis group members. Clearly, even though Renee said that she does not take a side, she encouraged Julia to “speak up” similar to the way that she persuaded her mother to “stick up for herself.”

What Episode #1 Revealed About the Group’s Behavior

Past experiences, combined with apparent leftover psychological tension from earlier dealings with one another, resulted in the exchange described in Episode #1. Otherwise, the exchange would have unfolded in a more benign fashion. The picture of the nephew was never actually produced. Julia still didn’t ask to see the picture. Kate didn’t volunteer to show the picture or reveal whether she had the picture in her possession that particular day. Instead, the picture became symbolic of the residual tension and secondary to whether the two group members were at odds with each other.

This particular exchange was typical of the dynamics within the group. Each
group member was invested in speech that positioned her in a role that played out in a dynamic fashion among the three group members. Julia felt as though she was slighted, overlooked, not connected. Kate took a stance of resistance and avoidance. Renee felt the need sometimes “to step up” to mediate the tension. All three participants admitted that they avoided or disliked conflict. Group members reacted by using behavior and skills developed in their past to respond to tension in the present.

Consistent with many of the writings on psychodynamic psychology is a recognition of the significance of our interactions with other individuals and their influence on the development of our personalities. Lemma-Wright (1995) maintains, “The belief that it is important to uncover our past is central to all psychodynamic approaches” (p. 50). The attitudes, values, and habits developed in the first group in a person’s life, the family, can strongly influence later behavior. Past relations, especially parent-child relations, can be unconsciously transferred into daily social relations at primarily an unconscious level. “Transference is the emotional relationship that develops between two or more people and is based on emotional attitudes left over from childhood, which are transferred to the current situation” (Berne, 1968, p. 372).

During psychoanalysis the transference from the patient to the therapist plays a huge role in the therapeutic process. Generally, when an alliance is formed between the patient and therapist, the patient will transfer emotions from primary relationships such as those with the parents, onto the therapist. The therapist can then utilize the transference to understand the behavior of the patient. Likewise, an understanding of this concept and how it plays out in the classroom can offer deeper insight to adult educators.
I assert that Julia transferred her emotions, when she became anxious about Kate’s avoidance and resistance, to Renee. Julia looked to her own mother to calm her down and offer guidance when she faced problems. Julia told me that her mother had “always been our comfort zone” and “we always go to my mom when we need something.” In ways similar to Julia’s mother, Renee encouraged Julia to speak up in the group. Renee explained “I’ve been there for her to talk to” when Julia had a problem. As described earlier, Renee took on this role, in the past, with her own family. For example when she encouraged her own mother to “stick up for herself.” All of the roles played out in by the participants could be traced to past experiences.

Episode #2: The Group was Frozen in the Face of Authority

During this work session, the thesis group members met in a room at the university library. The group was at the beginning stage of data collection. They had recently sent introductory letters to possible participants at three sites that were to participate in the study. On this particular day they were creating incentive coupons that would be given to study participants.

Episode #2 centered around a phone call that one group member made on behalf of the group. The phone call was to a clinical expert who had been a member of their proposal defense team and with whom the group had a troublesome relationship. The group members needed to obtain the phone number of the clinician who had an office in a nearby city. Episode #2 is depicted in Table 4.2.

What Episode #2 Revealed About Julia

My impression of Julia’s behavior during her phone conversation was that she was nervous. She began the conversation by apologizing that the call may have been at an
Table 4.2 Analytical Description of Episode #2: The Group was Frozen in the Face of Authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Behavior</th>
<th>Researcher’s Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kate stated, “I don’t know why I have Joan’s phone number?”</td>
<td>Kate made a point to question why she would have the phone number of an individual who the group officially does not like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee replied, “You love her.”</td>
<td>Renee responded to Kate’s sarcasm by making a statement that was the opposite of how she believed Kate felt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate agreed, “I love her.”</td>
<td>Kate played along and made this statement in an exaggerated tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group members laugh.</td>
<td>All of the group members responded to the irony of Kate having the phone number because she was accused of being fond of the clinician.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia dialed the number on her cell phone and told the person that answered, “I’m one of the students working with Joan Barr and we want to know if she is available to talk or a good time to call back.” Julia is placed on hold.</td>
<td>Julia’s demeanor was professional yet tentative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate changed her voice to a mocking tone and said, “She won’t like y’all.”</td>
<td>Again, Kate used sarcasm that reflected the possible displeasure the group would encounter from the clinician.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

inconvenient time. Next, she thanked the practitioner for sending an email message in a timely manner. Then, Julia explained that the group was not getting a response from the contact and ‘we just don’t know what we need to do’. Julia’s manner of talking to the practitioner was that of a child talking to a parent or some other authority figure.

Another time, Julia talked about when the group met with the clinical expert and Dr. Smith was not present. She stated, “We kind of had to turn around and be assertive and get our point across as to why we were doing what we were doing.” In summing up the way the group felt about the clinician, Julia said, “We just kind of butt heads, a little
bit, with Joan, I think if you just want to come down to it. That’s why we don’t like dealing with her.”

Julia talked about the process of narrowing down the thesis topic to a manageable task that could be completed in nine months. The clinical expert suggested that the topic be more inclusive. The three group members met with the clinician and her staff in an effort to convince them that what they suggested was too broad to be completed in nine months. Julia talked about how the expectations of the clinician made her feel. She stated:

_I really don’t know how much experience that she and her staff have with the research process itself and how difficult it is. It just aggravated me a little bit to have to deal with that and somebody constantly telling you they want you to go in another direction when you know feasibly you can not go in that direction and you are the one that’s sitting there doing all the work. And that gets frustrating._

In order to make a connection between past experiences and present behavior, I asked Julia if she could connect the experience with the clinician to anything from her past. Julia recalled when her oldest child, a daughter, was born and her husband’s stepmother came to visit:

_Back when I had my daughter, she was a baby, and my husband’s stepmother who had had no children whatsoever tried to come in and tell me what I was doing wrong. Coming in and my daughter she was a baby. She was crying and I had just fed her. Then the stepmother comes in and she’s like that baby’s hungry, you better feed her. You’re not doing this right, you’re not doing that right. That just really aggravated me that she came in and tried to, I guess, more or less, take over the situation and tell me what I was doing wrong when I knew that I had_
already done all the things that she said that I needed to be doing and that was not what was wrong with my child.

Julia’s reaction to her stepmother’s overly zealous concern about her daughter-in-law’s parenting skills sounded similar to the way that the clinical expert was experienced by Julia. When relating how she experienced both her mother-in-law and the clinician, Julia used some of the same language to describe both experiences. Developmentally, Julia reacted like Renee and Kate when it came to exhibiting assertive behavior. All three were ambivalent about asserting themselves. When talking to me about the thesis topic and the steps she had taken to calm her newborn daughter, Julia expressed certainty and conviction. However, she had been unable to convey this confidence with the clinician or her mother-in-law as is evidenced by the way that she described the incidents above.

What Episode #2 Revealed About Kate

Kate reported that the group members had preconceived opinions about the clinician. She explained that students who had worked with this person in the past “told us that she was very hard to work with.” The rumors were confirmed during the group’s proposal defense the previous semester. During the defense, each group member was questioned individually by the committee while the other two group members waited outside the defense room. In describing her proposal defense, Kate stated, “Honestly, I felt attacked when she (the clinical expert) would ask me questions. It was awful but I made it through.” I asked Kate to give an example of what happened during the defense. She stated:

There was one part, we developed two questionnaires and on one questionnaire it lists eight activities that we thought kids would engage in at this certain age and
she drilled me for I mean a good two or three minutes on why there was a
difference between fine motor toys and small toys, or something. I can’t
remember the exact whatever it was. But I mean we argued for that length of time
and it was hard. It was intimidating. She’s a very intimidating lady, very.

Kate described how she felt about what happened, “Not good. I didn’t like it at all. I was
very mad. I felt attacked.”

According to Kate she used to be “really shy in high school.” She reported that it
wasn’t until her second year of college that she “opened up.” And more recently, since
she got married, she has “opened up even more.” Kate said that her assertiveness started
to develop when she got to Wheaton. She explained:

One of our professors, she was very adamant about teaching us how to be
assertive. When we’re out on fieldwork and we don’t feel comfortable doing
something, a procedure, a treatment, or anything, that we should say, I don’t feel
comfortable doing this, could you show me how? And just, you know, being
assertive for ourselves. And I think that’s where it started developing and its still
in the childlike stages of being developed but I’m getting there and it’s coming.

Kate talked about a shift in her outlook on life that occurred in 1998. Her attitude
about life, in general, shifted to a more positive perspective. Also, the things she valued
changed. For example, she talked about “instead of looking to money for happiness, it’s
the relationships, family, and affiliation with those things that you find happiness in.”
Kate attributed the shift to her faith and she “got saved in ’98 and ever since then my
outlook is shifted.”
On the one hand Kate stated that her husband encouraged her to “toughen up and not let people run over you.” On the other hand when asked how she put the confrontation with the clinician into perspective, she replied:

_I talked to my husband about it and I voiced to him that I wasn’t very happy. And he said, you know she’s just trying to help you learn. I didn’t want to accept it at the time. But he’s probably right._

When I asked Kate if she had ever had an experience like that before, she replied, “I never been put in a situation to defend what I’ve been doing like that up until this point. So, no.” This is typical of the nature of previous responses, related to conflict, given by Kate. For example, when I asked her to remember a time recently when she avoided conflict, she replied, “I don’t know. I don’t have much conflict in my life so I can’t tell you any instances.” However, over the course of the three interviews with her, she told me stories that were indicative of conflict in her life.

One incident, that contained conflict, centered on a professor and colleagues during Kate’s undergraduate studies. The professor had a reputation for awarding points based on how much he liked a student. Kate and the professor got along well and she felt that her colleagues made innuendoes about her grade. It was very difficult to get Kate to talk about this incident. She talked in vague terms and in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the incident, probing was required. When I asked how she reacted to her colleague’s comments, she stated, “I just kind of shook it off and went on about my business.” However, she later contradicted this statement by describing how she made changes in her behavior, by being “more stand offish and more cautious”, as a result of the implication by colleagues that she was a “pet.”
When asked why – she stated, “No, I can’t tell you why, I don’t know, it’s a mental mindset of what people are – I don’t know.” Kate was resistant to talk about her motives around this incident. As was typical of Kate’s responses, she avoided and resisted the opportunity to reflect on her past behavior.

Where conflict was involved Kate vacillated between denial, reaction formation, and different developmental stages of assertiveness. Gladding (1999) maintains that reaction formation is “when an individual behaves in a manner that is just the opposite of how he or she feels. This type of behavior is usually quite exaggerated, such as acting, especially nice to someone who one dislikes intensely” (p. 344). An example of reaction formation was described in Episode #2 when Kate stated, “I love her” in reference to the clinical expert. The other group members understood the irony of the statement. Several times over the course of the interviews she denied conflict when it was present. Kate was struggling with the calibration of the appropriate amount of assertiveness that a situation warranted. She wasn’t clear about when it was okay to be assertive. Adding to her confusion was the admonition by her husband to “toughen up” yet he dismissed and devalued her expression of assertiveness with the clinician.

*What Episode #2 Revealed About Renee*

Similar to the way that Kate and Julia viewed the clinical expert, Renee stated, “Joan is a very intimidating person.” However, Renee went on to say, “She’s always been nice to me in general. Like I know she attacked Kate in the defense of the thesis.” Later in the interview I began asking a question by saying, “When you say that Joan attacked Kate in the . . . ”. Renee interrupted and stated, “Now that’s the words that Kate uses.”
Renee glossed over the fear that the clinical expert generated at various times. She also implied that Kate exaggerated the severity of the proposal defense incident.

Renee was frustrated because she experienced the clinical expert as “so set in her ways that she won’t accept any of our ideas when this is our thesis.” Renee recalled two times when Dr. Smith had to “step in and redirect Joan.” One of the two times was over the telephone. Renee described the incident by saying:

Kate and Julia didn’t want to get on the phone with her. So they let me deal with her. I had to get on the phone and explain to her, remember when we talked about this? She was like, oh yeah. So she was fine. She’s not as awful as we portray her to be.

Renee implied that she was the group member that was able to tolerate the clinician’s inconsistency and intimidation. She also minimized the group members’ fear of the clinician. In addition, the group’s tendency to depend on the thesis supervisor is clear in this example.

Renee had described herself as being different in the group than she was with her husband and family. When asked to elaborate she stated that in the beginning stages she didn’t always speak up in the group the way she did with her family. She also stated that she did not always speak up with her father when she should. When she did speak up with her father it was “not so positive.” When asked to elaborate she stated, “That’s more yelling, not necessarily yelling but speaking harshly. Because he doesn’t listen to me. He grew up with a bad family supposedly.”
Renee experienced the clinical expert as intimidating. She also related an earlier experience when another supervisor had been internalized as an intimidating figure.

Renee described this earlier experience:

*My first CI (clinical instructor) that I had in fieldwork was very much like Joan, very demanding. It was my first fieldwork. I didn’t really know hardly anything about the field. I hadn’t had any classes or anything and she expected me to know everything and actually it was awful. Jennifer Jones, do you know her? She’s over there in the department, she’s the fieldwork coordinator and she had to come down and have a meeting between me and my CI. And ‘cause my CI told her I didn’t communicate well and all this stuff. Unfortunately that was my first lesson in being assertive.*

The experience above is evidence of a professional stepping in to mediate trouble between a thesis group member and an authority figure.

During an earlier interview, Renee talked about a past experience when she had asked her dad to help her with her homework. The experience with her father was described in the following way, “I went to him one time to help me with math homework. Never again because he was explaining something way over my head and I couldn’t understand. He just got mad and threw everything everywhere.” Renee never asked her father for help with homework again.

At Renee’s last interview, I asked about the possibility of a connection between the homework experience with her father and the way she experienced her supervisors. Renee stated,
It could be. I mean I was never taught by him to be assertive that’s for sure. I was the child and he was the adult and whatever he said went and you were not taught to question that in any way and if you did that wasn’t good. So that could be where I got it from and definitely my communication issues are from him.

Even though Renee is an adult she used the same roadmap for interacting with authority figures that she had been taught as a child. This outdated roadmap that promoted fear, combined with the dysfunctional communication patterns modeled by her father, made it difficult for Renee to empower herself in situations with older, well respected individuals. She understood and was able to express the ineffective communication patterns that caused her trouble. As was reported earlier she was beginning to risk a new communication style with her mother. However, the unfamiliarity of communicating disagreement openly caused Renee apprehension.

*What Episode #2 Revealed About the Group’s Behavior*

In an interview with Kathy Smith, the group’s thesis supervisor, she talked about the group’s anxiety related to the clinician. Dr Smith stated, “The only time they really look for much from me is when there’s conflict external to the group, like Joan Barr, the gal who is our clinical expert, just scares them to death.” I then asked Dr. Smith, “Can you tell me what happened? It was during the prospectus defense right?” Dr. Smith replied:

*It wasn’t. They have been scared of her from the get-go. Part of it is that Joan is really a brilliant therapist. But there’s some affective thing that she does that intimidates students and I don’t think she’s in tune with it internally. It’s not her intent at all. But she is intense and she does think about things a lot so she’ll kind
of wrinkle her forehead and she’ll ask these questions and they’ll be hard questions and they just tizzify over it. I didn’t think she was bad at all in the prospectus but they were like OHHHH! They’re a little frustrated with her because she – I think they’re quick to think that she’s forgotten or she’s not followed through in some kind of way. My take on her is she’s a busy clinician, she owns her own practice, she’s doing this in a way, partly because she’s interested, but partly just being a good guy and it’s not the primary thing on her brain all the time. So I have to keep reminding the students that it’s their thesis, it’s not Joan’s thesis. But they feel like they have - like one of the things that happened in the prospectus is she, Joan, felt like she had not gotten the current thesis which I thought they had sent to her. Well I think what they had done was to send her a previous version that was pretty close to the final version. But somehow it didn’t arrive in a form that Joan knew this was really it. Plus Joan had never done prospectus defense before, she had never done this before. And so she was tizzified when she came in – it was like, ‘Oh I haven’t seen it.’ They were taking that like ‘what do you mean we sent it to you.’ So they took that as criticism when I think it might have been gentle criticism but it wasn’t like ‘you guys are terrible.’ It was just like oh gee I haven’t seen this and I’m not quite sure, you know, it just took her a while to settle down to her question. And then she asked them questions that were good questions. And they were able to answer them. It wasn’t any big deal.
The transcript clearly showed that all three group members had similar feelings about Joan Barr even though two group members (Renee and Kate) minimized the severity of fear that was felt. Because of the consistency in the descriptions of the clinician by the group members, I felt confident that the thesis group members were not being hypersensitive nor reading too much into the actions of this individual. Clearly there was a difference in perspective between Dr. Smith and the three group members. Besides the obvious difference of status and threat potential, the difference was partly developmental. It was also affected by past experiences, with authority figures, of the participants. However, there is one more consideration. Bion (1970) maintains that, “The group needs to preserve its coherence and identity; efforts to do so are manifested in conventions, laws, culture, and language” (p. 63). Consequently, the agreement and consistency of the group member’s perspective on the clinician served a cohesive function for the group. When interviewed individually some of the group members minimized the severity of the clinician’s demeanor but when together, the group as a whole, voiced agreement about her behavior.

In early February my dissertation supervisor and I met to discuss the data I had collected thus far. At that point I had: 1) held an introductory meeting with the participants, 2) observed one feedback and work session, 3) conducted one series of interviews, and 4) conducted one interview with the thesis supervisor. From the data collected, it was evident there was psychological tension around the clinician. My major professor and I decided that in the next series of interviews I should pursue the connection between the internal world of the participants and what or who Joan Barr symbolized to the group participants. Consequently, in the second interview I made the
following statement to each of the three group members: “I’ve noticed some tension and concern around the clinical expert, Joan Barr. I was wondering if you would talk with me about that.”

As was seen from the data described in the previous sections, each group member talked freely about the clinician. Julia said, “She always wants things done her way. Her way’s the right way is the way we perceive it anyway.” Kate replied, “She stresses us out, on occasion, at the defense she really stressed us out.” Renee stated, “Joan is a very intimidating person.”

The assertiveness skills of the group members were influenced by past experiences and pivotal people. They were in conflict about when and how to assert themselves. Influential people, such as teachers, professors, and family members, had encouraged them to be assertive. Consequently, the group members understood the importance of being able to communicate in an assertive way. However, family members had also communicated mixed messages about being outspoken, which led to confusion, and insecurity about how to speak up without being easily thwarted.

**Episode #3: The Group was Disabled by Anxiety**

The sample for the study conducted by the thesis group was to come from three different sites. The first step in the data collection process was to send a letter that explained the study to all of the possible participants in the sample. Episode #3 happened when the group thought they had encountered an obstacle related to data collection.

I became aware of the group members’ dilemma when I arrived for my second observation of a group work session. Episode #3 is depicted in Table 4.3 below.
Table 4.3 Analytical Description of Episode #3: The Group was Disabled by Anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Behavior</th>
<th>Researcher’s Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When Kate arrived, Renee informed her, “There’s 49 kids in these classes and I didn’t send enough letters so I don’t know who in the world she gave these letters out to. And she won’t call back.”</td>
<td>Renee was anxious that she “didn’t send enough letters.” At this point, it was not necessary that she know who received the letters. Anxiety kept Renee from being able to put this problem into perspective. Her anxiety also created hostility toward the contact person. The anxiety combined with hostility impeded Renee from giving the contact credit for being able to handle the shortage of letters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julia added, “We tried to call Dr. Smith to get Joan’s number and we can’t get in touch with her.”</td>
<td>The clinician had a private practice in a nearby area. The group could have called information to get her phone number. The group displayed dependency on an individual, whom they had empowered with authority, to give them something they were capable of obtaining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate joked about the fact that she had Joan’s phone number, Then Julia phoned the clinician’s office and asked to speak to her. While Julia was on hold and waiting for Joan to come to the phone, Kate said, “Is she getting her out of a session?”</td>
<td>Kate vacillated between lighthearted joking and fear about contact with the clinical expert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Joan answered, Julia said, “We had mailed Rita forty letters that were to go out to the parents explaining what we had done and now we’re not sure who got the letters because there wasn’t enough. Renee has left about 2 or 3 messages and we still haven’t got a return phone call. We’re getting the packets ready to send to her and we just don’t know what we need to do.”</td>
<td>This was another display of dependency on an individual in authority to tell the group members what to do rather than a reliance on the problem solving skills of the group members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julia replied to Joan, “It’s not the packet of information with all the things in it—it’s just a letter explaining to them what we’re going to do.”</td>
<td>Julia clarified the purpose of the letter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia stated, “Well, no, we don’t get any response from the letter.”</td>
<td>Joan again asked for clarification about the purpose of the letter. She wanted to be certain she had not missed the importance of this letter.</td>
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</table>
Table 4.3 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Behavior</th>
<th>Researcher’s Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julia, “We’re not expecting a response from the letter, that was just letting the</td>
<td>Joan was baffled about the feelings of urgency on the part of the group members. She was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents know we would be sending a packet home.”</td>
<td>also confused as to why the group called her when they were capable of resolving this snag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Julia ended the call, she told Kate and Renee, “She said what they probably</td>
<td>Dependency and anxiety prevented the group members from realizing this obvious solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>did is just made copies and gave them to the other kids.”</td>
<td>Another example of lack of problem solving and critical thinking around this issue by the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Renee asked what Joan thought about Rita Burke not calling back, Julia</td>
<td>group but rather dependency on an authority figure to tell them what to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stated, “She said what we can do is call the _____ school and get Rita Burke’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>email address and email her and she thought that would be easier for us to get</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in touch with her.”</td>
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As usual, the work session took place in a workroom at the university library. When I got to the observation room, Kate had not yet arrived. Renee and Julia were at a standstill because they had not heard from the contact person at one of the sites.

What Episode #3 Revealed About Julia

In Episode #3, Julia’s regression was partially manifested through dependency.

*Dictionary of Psychology* defines regression as “a return to earlier levels of development” (p. 391). Rather than calling information or looking up Joan’s phone number in the telephone directory, Julia demonstrated dependency on Dr. Smith for information that she could have possibly retrieved. She again displayed regression during the phone conversation with the practitioner when she stated, “we just don’t know what we need to do.”
In Episode #1, Julia’s tendency to look to others to calm her when she felt anxious was established. This is a role that her own mother and Renee had played for her. Consequently, it is not unusual that she looked to Dr. Smith, her thesis supervisor, to provide what she needed. In this particular case Julia was seeking a phone number. Considering the phone number would put her in touch with someone whom intimidated her it wasn’t a surprise that she looked to Dr. Smith rather than take it upon herself to find the phone number.

Julia was described as a perfectionist by Dr. Smith:

*Julia is hyper about criticism. We’ve worked on her for a long time about this and she knows this, she can articulate it really well. But she’s just a perfectionist and she gets nervous about things. She has a lot of anticipatory anxiety about stuff so she overprepares and then she always does fine. Then she always worries about what she did wrong. That’s just the way she is.*

Julia expressed concerns about her perfectionist tendencies affecting her children in a negative way, “I guess, I try to be a perfectionist and I’m really working on that too though because it’s rubbing off on my children.”

We have seen Julia’s dependency work in her favor through the creation of a support system. For example, her mother, sister, and Renee had been available to help Julia when she was upset about something in the past. In this incident, her dependency hindered her problem solving capability. If she had been thinking clearly she would have realized that she did not need Dr Smith or the clinician to resolve this issue.

Julia’s dependency in combination with her own perfectionist tendencies hindered her capacity to think critically in Episode #3. Renee and Julia spiraled up together around
what they perceived as an obstacle that would prevent them from moving forward on their thesis project. As shown earlier, Julia had tendencies to depend upon Renee for guidance and leadership. When Renee lost perspective because of her own anxiety, Julia joined in Renee’s anxiety and regression; therefore, neither of the group members were able to see the obvious.

What Episode #3 Revealed About Kate

Intellectually, Kate felt that a positive attitude and taking on the role of encourager was desirable. She attributed a commitment to faith with changing her attitude and said, “I think that’s when I started picking up the role as an encourager and a positive person.” And even though she talked about how the group took Joan’s behavior in stride, Kate was not always able to detach from the emotion and anxiety that she felt where the clinician was involved.

The following narrative from Kate’s transcript contains statements that are examples of the ambivalent feelings that she has when dealing with this individual. Kate stated:

She stresses us out on occasion. At the defense she really stressed us out. But we’ve kind of gotten over it. You know how Dr. Smith says put on your tin panties. We’ve learned to do that and she hasn’t affected Renee, Julia and I as a group. It’s kind of put a stress individually but the group dynamics has not changed because of her. We have fun making jokes about it. We pick at each other, like who’s going to call Joan or you know that kind of thing. It’s really a joke now. It was intense – kind of stressful at first but now we, like a lot of other things, we just kind of play it off and pick at it and make fun.
Kate displayed examples of both healthy and dysfunctional regression. Kate’s display of humor was an example of a healthy defense mechanism. She was able to lighten the mood briefly through her joking. However, like Renee and Julia, ultimately Kate was not able to lead the group out of their need to turn to an authority figure to resolve the problem.

What Episode #3 Revealed about Renee

I assert that Renee’s investment in being a perfectionist created anxiety when she realized she had not sent enough letters. Consequently, she was not able to get past the psychological tension created by the dissonance between her perfectionist image and her focus on not sending enough letters. The psychodynamic forces clouded her ability to detach and clear her mind to problem solve.

Renee described herself as “a bit of a perfectionist.” She explained, “I don’t do things 50% of the way. If I’m going to do it, I want to do it all the way.” Dr. Smith described Renee by saying, “Renee is working real hard to have a balanced and healthy life.” Julia described Renee by saying, “Renee too tries to be a perfectionist. She is definitely not a procrastinator at all. Renee is very intelligent and she likes to keep on top of things.”

Renee stated, “I like to get everything done or else I feel stressed out. I’m a big planner, I plan everything.” I asked Renee if she could think of something early in her life that led to this. She replied:

I don’t know if it was even going back to soccer I had to plan out what I had to take with me. My mother even made me write out lists of what I needed to take because I used to always forget one thing or another and we had to go all the way
back home. I was never allowed to be a procrastinator like all through elementary
or middle school. If I had homework you did it. You didn’t put it off. If you had
projects due you weren’t allowed to wait ‘til the last minute. I guess just my whole
upbringing, procrastination was not allowed.

Renee regressed to her perfectionist tendencies in an effort to comfort herself and
gain more control over the anxiety she experienced about this data collection issue.
Renee’s anxiety also created some paranoia as evidenced by her perception that vital
information was being withheld from her (“I don’t know who in the world she gave these
letters to”). Had she been able to step back and think clearly, she would have concluded
that the contact person made the additional copies needed.

Renee also displayed mild aggression as shown by her anger toward the site
contact who “won’t call back.” This was an attempt to displace her anger onto a safe
target. Gladding (1999) maintains that displacement is a “redirection of an emotional
response onto a safe target. The substitute person or object receives the feeling instead of
the person directly connected with it” (p. 344). Renee was angry with herself for not
being perfect yet displaced her anger onto the site contact.

What Episode #3 Revealed About the Group’s Behavior

During this observation of a group work session, I discerned that the group
member’s were feeling stressed due to the demands of their academic program; there
were more digressions and displays of humor than at the first observation. I believe the
digressions and humor were used to relieve the stress of feeling overwhelmed.
Consequently, the participant’s displayed some use of healthy defense mechanisms.
However, the intensity of psychodynamic forces prevented them from being effective in this situation.

The group members seemed scattered and unable to focus and think critically around the hitch in the data collection process. Their conversations to each other were intermittent between phone calls, computer time, and joking that kept them distracted from settling down enough to tackle this snag in a mature way. The suggestions that the clinical expert offered were solutions that the group members could have offered themselves had the psychodyndamic forces not been so strong.

Apparently, this was not new behavior for the group. In an interview with Julia, she talked about a situation from the past that was similar, “we had to get Dr. Smith to help us and we couldn’t get in touch with her so we were at a standstill.” My interview with Dr. Smith also shed some light on the behavior of the group members. Dr. Smith said, “And they are anxious about collecting data and they have been working hard and doing stuff.” Dr. Smith was aware of the tendency on the part of the group members to depend upon her when they got into a tough situation. Dr. Smith explained:

So they come to me to manage their external conflicts for them and I pick and choose when I do that. Most of the time I just send them back. But if I feel like they’re at a psychological point where they’re kind of fried and they’re really nervous and it’s going to undercut their learning then I’ll jump in and rescue them and I do that periodically, maybe once a month.

Episode # 4: How the Group Depicted Itself

Many readings and re-readings of the interview transcripts pointed to the contradictions that caught my attention and led to the emergence of Episode #4. The
group members and the thesis supervisor were invested in portraying the group as conflict-free. Unlike the other three episodes, Episode #4 is not bound by time but rather by similarity of themes. The quotes that appear in Table 4.4 were taken from the ten interviews that were conducted over a three-month period.

Each group participant, including the thesis supervisor, shared tendencies toward idealization of this group. Group members tended to favorably compare themselves to other groups. They also talked about having chosen each other as group members because of the qualities they recognized that were a match with their own capabilities. The thesis supervisor talked about the group members’ sophistication in choosing each other and her as a supervisor.

A careful reading of the transcripts produced statements that contradicted the image of a conflict-free group. Instead a more realistic, complex, and interesting depiction of the group was reflected in the narratives. Violent disagreements were not part of this group’s personality, the conflict was subtle and well hidden. Table 4.4 depicts some examples of quotes that demonstrate the idealized image in which the group members invested. “The idealized image is a false and exaggerated estimate of one’s true potentialities and abilities and is derived more from fantasy and wishes than from reality” (Chaplin, 1985, p.219).

Table 4.4 Analytical Description of Episode # 4: How the Group Depicted Itself

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Behavior</th>
<th>Researcher’s Interpretation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julia began a conversation about the general atmosphere in the group by saying,</td>
<td>Julia vacillates between portraying the group as conflict-free and openness about conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We all get along very well.” Later in the same paragraph, she stated, “The</td>
<td>between group members. She began by saying the group got along “very well”, then she</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atmosphere is usually fairly well. There have been a couple of times when there’s</td>
<td>mentioned tension, but ended by assuring me that they work things out with “no problem.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>been a little tension personally. But we usually work things out with no problem.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed Behavior</td>
<td>Researcher’s Interpretation</td>
</tr>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Renee told me, “I think we’re probably the best matched group in our class.”</td>
<td>We are more functional than other groups. Up until this point, the tension between Julia and Kate have not stopped us from completing our assigned task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate described the group by saying, “We’ve not had any conflict. I’ve seen some of the other groups at work and I’ve heard the conflict in them and we’ve not had that.”</td>
<td>Our group is different than other groups. Other groups disagree but not ours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia said, “But just like one of the group members, we had a disagreement, it didn’t have anything to do with thesis, it was a personal matter. I could tell for several weeks after that, being around her, that she was still mad about it. I’m the one that called her back and said, ‘Oh maybe I was wrong.’ Even though I didn’t believe that. There have been a couple of times when I thought something was wrong with one of the other group members. I asked her a couple of times, ‘Are you okay?’ One time she came back, ‘Nothings wrong with me. Why do you ask that?’ I don’t know if it was either that she was being defensive that day because something was going on or I don’t know what happened there but any way. We won’t go there.</td>
<td>This is another example of Julia being willing to talk, to certain extent, about conflict in the group. She tells enough to let me know there have been bumpy times but stopped short of giving detail or naming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee told me that she was “very open” with the group. “I am able to speak my mind and both of them are very open and accepting of what I have to say.” But she maintained that this was “not true for some. I don’t think they necessarily feel the same way. They don’t feel that they can be as open as they want to be. Because feelings will get hurt and things will get said. Someone doesn’t feel like they’re being heard and the other one doesn’t see the view of where she’s coming from.”</td>
<td>Renee’s description exemplifies the dynamics of the group. Although she stopped short of naming the players, I think she referred to Julia not feeling heard and Kate not seeing her point of view. During the discussions Renee became visibly uncomfortable; so uncomfortable, in fact, that I ended this line of questioning.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What Episode #4 Revealed About Julia

The first example of a contradiction was from an interview with Julia. In one and the same paragraph she said the group got along “very well” but then stated there had been some tension in the group. Later, in another interview Julia talked again about the tension in the group:

There is one group member that kind of sometimes I feel like just kind of goes on her own and types what she wants to type and makes decisions about what we should do and sometimes that aggravates me but there again I don’t say anything. This particular group member though is not as bad about doing it now as when we first started. And I think it may have been more so when we first started because it was such a new experience for us.

In the paragraph above, I believe that Julia is referring to Kate. In a new situation it is common for anxiety levels to be higher than in well-known situations when we are more comfortable. Kate defended against the anxiety she experienced by acting more aggressively and taking charge. Later, after becoming comfortable in the group she relaxed and was able to calibrate her behavior in a more even manner. The behavior that Julia consistently repeated was her reluctance to speak up. She explained her concern that if she spoke up that she might offend somebody.

Julia was also aware of her pattern to apologize when there had been a disagreement. She talked about displaying this behavior, in the past, with her twin sister, especially related to her sister’s personal life. Julia described her sister as getting “defensive” and “I’m usually the one that has to call back and apologize.” I asked Julia what she could attribute this to and she replied:
Probably my dad. My dad always joked a lot, he always picked a lot and things like that. And I think a lot of it had to do with, he was always worried about what other people thought about him. So he would just try to joke and um I don’t know it was like he was trying to get attention in some way. I don’t really know how to explain it. But, um I think we just watched my dad through the years.

Julia was very clear that she did not “like for people to be mad” at her. She gave her reluctance to have others mad at her as a reason for apologizing even when she did not feel she was at fault.

Julia talked more about her father; later in the interview I asked Julia how her dad reacted to disagreement. Julia said:

I have seen just the way he interacts with his friends and things like that – that if it looks like that he offended somebody that I could just see my dad going up to them and saying, “Hey man I didn’t mean anything by that. You know, I hope you’re not mad.”

The behavior that he displayed with his friends was strikingly similar to the way Julia described her own behavior around disagreement. Action was taken to defuse conflict when Julia thought that someone was holding a grudge.

What Episode #4 Revealed About Kate

Kate repeatedly told me there was no conflict in the group. During the last interview when I asked about a time when she had avoided conflict recently, her answer was, “I don’t know. I don’t have much conflict in my life so I can’t tell you any instances.” Denial or avoidance was a typical reaction when Kate encountered subjects that were uncomfortable for her to talk about.
Kate also had a tendency to minimize sensitive and unpleasant situations. When talking about a troublesome situation, her typical answer was, “It wasn’t a big deal” or “I just blow it off.” When asked to talk about how she was valued in the thesis group, Kate became uncomfortable and stated, “I don’t know. You have to ask them that. I don’t know.” In an effort to break through Kate’s defensiveness I said, “You don’t have a sense of what you mean to the group?” Kate replied, “Not really, I mean value me in what kind of way?” I said, “As a group member.” Kate replied, “No, just that I. They could do it without me. It would just be a lot of work for them. In that sense I guess I’m important. I don’t know how they value me.” Kate’s investment in positions of resistance and avoidance protected against the anxiety she felt when uncomfortable subjects were broached.

Kate was invested in speech that protected the family image as normal. She described her “family group” as “ordinary people.” When asked to remember family stories from the past, she was likely to say, “I don’t know. I hadn’t thought about this stuff in forever.” Another time she replied, “This is funny – remembering all this stuff. Or not remembering it. But, I don’t know.”

Kate described her role in the thesis group as encourager. She talked about a time from her past when she had been in that role. Her sister’s oldest son, Riley, was born six weeks early and was in the hospital for three weeks after his birth. There was a difference in the approach that the parents and grandparents had about how to handle the newborn. Kate said, “My parents were worried sick about him and of course my sister and her husband were too. But they took a more laid back approach than my parents did.” The first time Riley was taken to church there was anxiety that he would get sick. Kate
reacted by telling her family members, “You just have to say it’s okay and this is their kid.” Kate said:

*I stay neutral on a lot of stuff. Like situations will come up that are directly dealing with my sister and sometimes I’ll hear what’s going on through my parents maybe. But I don’t take a side. I made that a real important, that’s been a real important issue for me – is not to take sides. Because of what I have to say and my opinion on their situation should have no impact on how it plays out. And I feel that’s real important in a family situation. And uh, in saying that, I would stay neutral on a lot of things. But um, going back to the encouraging part, striking out what I said about Riley.*

At the next interview, Kate was concerned that she had told me personal stuff about her relatives. She was concerned that they not “be looked upon as different.” I assert that Kate was extremely anxious, thinking that she had broken the barriers that supported the family identity. Even though Kate had let her guard down somewhat during the second interview, embarrassing family secrets had not been revealed. Nevertheless, Kate was extremely anxious due to her perception that she had betrayed family members by sharing sensitive information. My first hunch about Kate’s reluctance to be forthcoming was confirmed – she was resistant to talking in an open and self-revealing way.

*What Episode #4 Revealed About Renee*

Renee described the general atmosphere in the group as, “Overall most of the time it’s very light hearted and fun. We laugh but we still get things done. I love the group, I wouldn’t change the group at all.”
Although Renee was forthright and admitted that tension existed between Kate and Julia she offered the information in a tentative manner. She talked briefly about the tension between Julia and Kate, “From both sides I get that so I don’t know. They get along well but there’s a little tension but I think it’s more personal tension than group related.”

Renee felt that the other group members were open and accepting of what she had to say. However, she did not think the other two members felt the same about each other. When I asked Renee what led her to think that, she obviously became uncomfortable. But she did say, “Because feelings will get hurt and things will get said. Someone doesn’t feel like they’re being heard and the other one doesn’t see the view of where she’s coming from. I don’t know.” Renee’s statement reflected the psychodynamic forces that were displayed this group. Julia doesn’t feel as though she’s being heard. Kate is resistant to considering Julia’s point of view. Renee’s role is to keep emotions from getting out of control.

In my second interview with Renee, I attempted to tap into her internal world around this role of mediator or being in the middle. I asked her to recall earlier times in her life when she might have been in this role.

*I guess I’m the mediator a lot for my mom and my brother. Um, just ‘cause they’re always getting in tiffs ‘cause they have to work closest together. And I guess I’m getting in the middle of that a lot and working that stuff out. ‘Cause my mom takes things the wrong way sometimes.*

Mediator was a role that Renee played, either consciously or unconsciously,
between her parents. This was not necessarily a comfortable role or one that Renee seemed to enjoy. However, her present behavior clearly showed her in this role and we heard evidence of past experiences when she was in this role.

*What Episode #4 Revealed About the Group’s Behavior*

I argue that all of the research participants in this study exhibited some degree of denial pertaining to the conflict that existed in the group. Gladding (1999) maintains, “In this process, a person refuses to see or accept any problem or troublesome aspect of life” (p. 344). Although Kate did discuss family and past experiences more openly in the second interview, she never allowed herself to explore connections in the same way that Julia and Renee did. Julia repeatedly told me I asked “hard questions” but was relatively open to the idea of exploring connections between present behavior and past experiences. In Renee’s final interview she talked about how being interviewed had affected her life:

*I actually went home and told my mother that. That I disagreed with the whole fact of when you don’t like something you’re not allowed to say it. She’s like Whoa, where’s this coming from? I was like I’ve been interviewed and I’m learning stuff. I actually did try and change though.*

Later in the interview, I asked Beth if she would talk more about how being interviewed was related to changes in her life. She stated:

*It makes you actually take time to think about the way things have been done in your life. And I’ve been thinking about it for a while but not as in depth as what we go into in here. And it really makes you stop and think about things that I need to change. Talking to you about it made me say Hmmmm if I can talk to her about it I can certainly talk to my mom about it. I don’t know I guess it just kind of gave*
me enough boost to finally do it. It’s hard to think about all this stuff especially going back into your childhood.

One of the group members shared with me that Dr. Smith had told the group she would help them when they encountered academic problems but they were expected to work the personal issues out themselves. Dr. Smith described the group in the following excerpt:

But I do believe that this group was pretty savvy in picking each other. I think they looked for certain kinds of working patterns and they seem to be able to work around it pretty well. So I think they picked each other pretty well and I think they picked me too for the way that I run the groups.

The expectations of the thesis supervisor were a factor in the investment, by group members, in an image of a conflict-free group. One of the group members informed me, “Dr. Smith said when we started this that she would help us on the process but we were adults and we should work through the conflict amongst ourselves, by ourselves.” The thesis supervisor confirmed her philosophy concerning group conflict by stating, “I pretty much feel like they’ve had two years of group process stuff - at this point they need to work out most stuff themselves.”

The group members respected and wanted to please their supervisor. They entrusted her with a great deal of power, knowledge, and experience. As one participant said, “I grew up with respect your elders and show respect for anyone that’s older than and in a higher position than you.”

Dr. Smith was quite clear about her boundaries concerning conflict among group members. When I asked if she had seen any significant conflict in the group, she replied,
“First of all I don’t go looking for conflict in the group.” Her clarity around boundaries allowed her to position herself in strictly a professional supervisory role.

At one point, Dr. Smith described the group by saying, “Pretty good working group actually. Not as much conflict, as you’d probably like to see. Sorry about that.” Recently, approximately two months since the last interview with this group, Dr. Smith expressed that she had gotten word of a recent “blowup” in the group. She also stated that the group members resolved it without her intervention.

Ringer (2002) discusses the phenomenon of groups to act as if something is true even when the majority of group members know that it is not. The thesis group was invested in idealization of the group, which manifested itself through the idea of a conflict-free group. Anzieu (as cited in Ringer, 2002) describes this phenomenon as ‘group illusion’. Group illusion, as described by Anzieu, is “where a part of the individual sense of identity of group members is replaced by an idealized collective unity. This provides a transitional space from which progression can occur” (p. 154). The group illusion defends against the anxiety of the existence of interpersonal conflict in the group. When the anxiety level was not mediated or became intense, as was the case in Episode #3, then the problem solving and critical thinking skills of the group members were negatively affected.
Summary of Findings

This chapter discusses the findings that emerged as a result of my research. In this chapter, I will summarize the findings, discuss the relevance to literature, and discuss implications of the study. It was the purpose of this study to:

1. to describe an adult learning group from a psychodynamic orientation.
2. to understand how the internal world of group members influenced group interaction.
3. to explore connections between early internalized experiences and present behavior that affected the group member’s experience of the group.

The adult learning group was comprised of three white women who participated in the study. The setting for the study was a college campus in a small Southern city. The group members were enrolled in a master’s level allied health program and were in the process of writing a master’s thesis. The entire group completed most components of the thesis.

The primary means of data collection were semi-structured individual interviews. Three interviews were conducted with each group member. One interview was conducted with the thesis supervisor. Observations and researcher notes were also used to enhance data analysis.

A holistic analysis showed that psychological tension and psychodynamic behavior existed in the adult learning group. Careful design of interview guides that
tapped into the internal world of the participant illuminated motivation for the particular
discourse in which the participant was invested. Connections between present behavior
and internalized experiences established the influence that the past exerted on the present.

Psychodynamic forces were discernible in the learning group and recognized
through the use of psychodynamic concepts such as transference and resistance. The
findings revealed that psychodynamic behavior was most evident when tension existed
between group members, when external tension was imposed by an outside person, such
as a supervisor, and when the group members encountered an obstacle related to thesis
completion. In addition, each group participant demonstrated an identity investment in
dialogue that was connected to early internalized experiences. Embedded within the
dialogue and the participants’ behavior were defense mechanisms such as denial and
regression; the use of these defense mechanisms protected and allowed the group
participant to maintain the identity in which she was invested.

There are many small findings related to the psychology of the participants, the
thesis supervisor, and myself throughout this study. But when one stands back from the
study and asks, “what was it all about?”, one arrives at the conclusion that there are three
principal findings. In this chapter I am going to spend my energy discussing and
expanding upon these principal findings. The three findings are:

• Group behavior can be illuminated by recognizing psychological characteristics of
  individuals and how they combine.

• Groups engage in patterns of behavior that cannot be predicted beforehand but can be
  observed, identified, and then anticipated.
• Psychodynamic forces can affect learning, increasing the need for group facilitators to be acutely aware of the purpose of groupwork.

Discussion of Principal Findings

The discipline of adult education has a long history of promoting group-based learning as a teaching technique. However, techniques from psychodynamic psychology have been under utilized to enhance our understanding of group behavior. This study sought to describe an adult learning group from a psychodynamic perspective.

Psychological Characteristics of Individuals, How They Combine, and Group Behavior

Theories derived from the field of psychology, specifically psychodynamic psychology, are particularly applicable to adult learning groups. Psychodynamic concepts such as resistance and transference were identifiable in the behavior of research participants from my study. The use of defense mechanisms, such as denial and regression were also observed. Group development theory was useful in the process of making meaning out of the data I collected. Specifically, I found the body of literature around roles that group members adopt particularly useful. All of the psychodynamic forces mentioned above are powerful in and of themselves, however, when the psychologies of individuals’ are combined, as in group settings, the environment becomes more complex.

Each of the individuals in an adult learning group will bring to the group life experiences they have internalized and that have shaped their worldview. Ringer (2002) calls these beliefs that are partially derived from early life experiences, internal working models. As a result of the group member’s internal working model, she will position herself in a particular way of relating to the world. A closer look at the role that the group
member takes up will reveal psychodynamic forces that drive the group member’s behavior. Group dynamics become even more complicated when the internal working models of individuals combine to form a unique group.

The research around roles that members of a group may adopt is plentiful (Benne & Sheats, 1978; Gladding, 1999). Munich and Astrachan (1983) define a role as “a dynamic structure within an individual (based on needs, cognitions, and values), which usually comes to life under the influence of social stimuli or defined positions” (p. 20). Gladding (1999) maintains that “the manifestation of a role is based on the individual’s expectation of self and others and the interaction one has in particular groups and situations” (p. 59). Often these roles are carried over from childhood. Sometimes a group member is aware of and owns the role she plays in the group. Often a group member is not conscious of the role they consistently play within the group. Knights (1993) maintains, “roles arise out of a complicated and often unconscious negotiation between donors and recipients” (p. 194).

In the present study, I assert that Julia positioned herself as being left out as a way to form a bond or connection with a third person in the group, Renee. Lerner (1997) maintains that relationship triangles serve a protective function. She explains that triangles can take many forms and that the purpose is to “reduce anxiety in one relationship by focusing on a third party, who we unconsciously pull into the situation to lower the emotional intensity in the original pair” (p. 156). Roles, like defense mechanisms, are most pronounced when anxiety in the group is high.
Renee was the perfect candidate for the third leg of this particular triangle. She had performed the same protective function in her mother and father’s relationship. When the anxiety between her mother and father escalated, Renee reduced the anxiety by serving as the third person that counseled her mother to “speak up” in the same way that she counseled Julia. Julia’s position of not being heard was paired with Renee’s past role of mediator to create a particular dynamic in the group.

Examples of defensive mechanisms and other psychodynamic concepts that were identified in the behavior of participants in this study were discussed in detail in Chapter 4. For example, in Episode #3, The Group is Disabled by Anxiety, anxiety around the issue of data collection was the impetus for causing group members to regress to the point that problem solving was impaired. Denial and idealization were used by the group members in Episode #4, How the Group Depicted Itself. The protective function of the group illusion was to defend against the anxiety of the existence of conflict within the group.

Since psychodynamic forces usually do result in pairings or triangles within groups and other defensive behaviors, an adult educator who is aware that these psychological interactions are common can exert greater discernment regarding her own reactions and how to best attain the objectives of the group work. Especially important is awareness that when stress and anxiety increase so does the intensity and frequency of defensive mechanisms and the manifestation of roles. After all, defense mechanisms serve a protective function; they are used as an attempt to lower the anxiety level of the individual or the group.
To sum up this finding, group behavior can be illuminated by psychological characteristics of the individuals and how they combine. An adult educator may be familiar with behaviors, attitudes, and personal characteristics of students. She may anticipate how a particular student will interact in a learning situation. However, predicting how a combination of individual students will interact as a group is more complex: Students bring numerous psychodynamic perspectives to a group that may play out in a variety of unknown ways.

This first finding leads us to ponder the much debated issue of group-as-a-whole versus individual. Because the combination of individuals create a unique group-as-a-whole, Ringer’s (2002) assertion that “Both individual and group-as-a-whole co-exist and both are essential elements of consideration” (p. 144), support this finding. Individuals and groups engage in patterns of behavior that are not predictable beforehand but with acute observation and reflection they can be anticipated. The argument concerning group-as-a-whole versus individual carries over into finding two which is discussed in the next section.

**Patterns of Group Behavior**

Groups engage in patterns of behaving that are unique to the group and that cannot be predicted beforehand. Each group member brings an individual psychology and internal working models to the group. Although group patterns cannot be predicted beforehand, typical behavior evolves and is displayed by the group. Ringer (2002) maintains, “there are patterns that recur within the group-as-a-whole that may move from one individual or sub-group to another. So, the individual or sub-group can function in ways that are engendered by group membership” (p. 146). Careful observation of a group
reveals group behavior that can be recognized and anticipated. According to Foley (1992):

> a group has its own dynamic, which is quite different from the dynamics of the individual personalities which make up the group. It follows from this that the group leader must work with group processes and the individual as related to them, and not with the individual separately. Each member is always engaged in the group dynamic, even if he is absent. (pp. 150-151)

In order to discern patterns of struggle and ambivalence, which I assert are inherent in all groups, acute observation is required by the group facilitator. Pseudo-acceptance and group collusion is common in groups. The purpose of pseudo-acceptance and group collusion is self-protection and to prevent anxiety. Harmony is stressed over everything, and the group is unwilling to talk about anything upsetting in an effort to maintain the status quo of the group (Gladding, 1999, p. 156). If taken to extreme levels pseudo-acceptance and group collusion can be problematic.

An example of group collusion from the present study was idealization of the group by it’s members and supervisor. When all members and the thesis supervisor were together, the group was portrayed as conflict free. However, two group members provided narrative that suggested the group was not conflict free. Kate and Dr. Smith were more invested in the group being portrayed as conflict free than Renee and Julia. I assert that the thesis supervisor had a high stake in seeing the group as conflict free and consequently, chose to portray the group this way. I also maintain that this was effective group leadership since the primary goal of the group was to complete a task. The group members were invested in a conflict free image in order to complete a task and they knew
their supervisor expected conflict to be held to a minimum so that the task could be completed. Dr. Smith held tremendous power in this situation. She administered grades and assessed the students’ readiness to graduate. My relationship with the group was different than Dr. Smith’s. I held no position of power over them and I believe this allowed them to lower their defenses around conflict within the group during observations and interviews with me. Therefore, I was able to access aspects of the group process that may not have been revealed to others. Dr. Smith told group members that she would assist them with the content but conflict was to be worked out among themselves. She told me that she did not “go looking for conflict.” Her boundaries around her professional role and expectations of the group were well established. Specifically, content and task completion were the primary goals of this group. Consequently, I believe Dr. Smith intentionally kept group process as a low priority in the interest of achieving the primary goal.

At times group patterns may shift and become less intense when members are not together as a group. An example from this study was the tendency of two group members to minimize their fear and dislike of the clinical expert when not with the group. However, when all group members were present, the dislike of the clinician strengthened group identity and preserved group cohesion.

The notion of the group-as-a-whole is an important concept for adult educators to grasp. Thinking about and describing patterns of perceiving, believing, and behaving that occur in the group-as-a-whole facilitate adult educators to work with the group as distinct from working with individuals in a group setting. Both foibles and competencies are accepted and utilized, for the purpose of learning, when using this perspective toward
group work. I believe that by working with group-as-a-whole, a more balanced, accurate and complete picture of group work is attained. This perspective to group work is multi-dimensional as opposed to one-dimensional surface perceptions that present a more simplistic version of the group. The charge for adult educators lies in learning to cultivate discernment about when, if, and how much to utilize this multi-dimensional, more complete approach to groups.

*Psychodynamic Forces and Learning*

Psychodynamic forces affect learning; consequently, a wise instructor understands that task clarity is a huge issue in how psychodynamic forces are understood and managed or not managed in a group. Ringer (2002) explores the paradox that activities in groups can both assist learning to occur and simultaneously distract the group from achieving useful learning. (p. 187) Psychodynamic forces are a given in a group setting. The adult educator has very little, if any control over how psychodynamic forces play out in a group. But the adult educator can maintain clarity about the purpose of the group and with awareness manage these forces, to a certain degree. The purpose, whether task completion, personal development, discussion, etc. will determine when and how instructors attempt to manage psychodynamic behavior, if at all. If the group facilitator loses focus of the group purpose, learning becomes diverted.

Impaired learning and problem solving was most apparent, in this study, when the participants were under stress and regressed to a less mature way of behaving. Freud (1917/1966) describes regression as “return of the ego to earlier phases of its development” (p. 357). The most memorable time occurred when the group members perceived an obstacle in obtaining the collection of data for their thesis. During the time
when the group members were the most regressed their problem solving capacity was noticeably impaired.

Next, I would like to contrast the thesis group with the disintegrating group that I wrote about in Chapter 1. As with the thesis group, on the surface my disintegrating group seemed to be conflict free. The professor of the graduate class was getting regular reports from the group facilitator and dropping in for visits in an effort to monitor the progress of the graduate level research project. However, the underlying psychodynamic forces in the group were not always discernible during short visits and were more pronounced when group members were under pressure to produce at the end of the class.

Contrary to the thesis group, the professor of the disintegrating group was interested in sorting through group process as well as content. When he realized that the group dynamics were more intense than he at first realized, he created space for the group to debrief about group process. Only two of the six group members chose to attend the debriefing session. Although several of the members told me that they were in conflict over some of the interaction with other group members, when the issue of conflict arose and others were present, they denied that there was turbulence in the group.

Bettleheim (1970) uses the term psychopedagogy to refer to acceptance and integration of unconscious processes with the rational mind in the teaching-learning situation. He notes that educators fail to take into account the impact that lack of inner awareness can exert on learning. He suggests that psychoanalysis and education be more firmly linked so that unconscious distortions within the teaching-learning encounter can be reevaluated and corrected. This is a tall order since it means that adult educators go through a significant inner journey in order to assist the adult learner.
Of utmost significance in this finding is the way in which psychodynamic psychology can be applied to adult learning. For example, Knights (1993) maintains that teachers are often subject to the effects of transference and sometimes find themselves imbued with the image of important others, even parents. He urges adult educators to utilize this psychodynamic technique as an “important analytical sensing device” to interpret what it may be saying about the group.

In addition to transference, psychodynamic forces often appear as denial, avoidance, and resistance. In referring to resistance during group development, Gladding (1999) states, “Resistance is best defined as any behavior that moves the group away from areas of discomfort, conflict, or potential growth” (p. 132). An adult educator who recognizes psychological attributes, such as transference, resistance, avoidance, and denial, appreciates a more complex and deeper understanding of groups. Group behavior appears less mysterious and less random. Most important, the success of accomplishing the goal of the group and the appropriate learning objective is enhanced.

Implications

A conviction that psychodynamic psychology has an important contribution to make to adult learning research and practice was a single organizing concept throughout the course of this dissertation research. If there was any doubt, this study dispels any notion that groups are uniform or monolithic. The participants in this study expressed a complex range of life experiences and circumstances that contributed to the way in which the adult learning group was experienced.

The utility of psychodynamic psychology as another way to think about groups is complicated. Therefore, a word of caution to adult education practitioners and researchers
is in order. The purpose of clinical psychodynamic psychology is to change behavior; however, when psychodynamic psychology is applied to groups in an educational setting the purpose is to gain understanding. Consequently, it behooves adult educators to primarily use these concepts to hypothesize about what may or may not be happening in the classroom and to increase understanding about group work. I am not suggesting that they be used as interventions or to diagnose individuals.

Implications for Research

It was the purpose of this study to describe an adult learning group from a psychodynamic orientation. Particular attention was paid to the investment in dialogue embraced by a participant. An understanding of this investment was sought by gaining access to the participant’s internal world. In addition, a focus on the connections between early internalized experiences and present behavior that affected the group member’s experience of the group were sought. Based on this study’s findings, the following recommendations are made for future research:

1. A longitudinal qualitative study of an adult learning group would enhance conditions, related to trust, when dealing with severely defended subjects. Due to the fact that the subjectivity of the researcher and the participant was an integral component of this study, it is important to establish trust within the relationship. Some participants are willing to self-reveal within a short period of time, however, others require longer to feel safe enough to reveal their internal world.

2. Areas that were not accessible in this study related to issues of race and gender. Future studies will have to consider the ways in which social positioning may affect psychodynamic behavior and how the group is experienced. The sample selection criteria
for this dissertation included the study of a group involved in a work task that included the requirement of a high stake product as the outcome of the group. In addition, due to a research design that included multiple interviews, the sample size needed to be small. Consequently, the sample that matched these criteria included only white females. A study that includes males, or a mix of males and females as well as other ethnic groups could explore the way in which the psychodynamic behavior of these populations affect their experience of an adult learning group.

3. Studying adult learning groups in a different setting and a different geographical location could offer insight into the psychodynamic behavior related to past experiences. My study included Southern women in an allied health field. The culture of a different population and geographical area may affect the psychodynamic behavior and past experiences of the participant. This group was a long-term task group which have special characteristics. Replicating this study’s design, but focusing on a group with a different purpose, such as training groups, short-term discussion groups, focus groups, etc. would continue to expand the knowledge base.

4. This study might provide a foundation for quantitative research if the sample size is increased. An exploration of how psychodynamic forces play out in larger groups as compared to small groups would enlighten educators about group size and learning.

Implications for Practice

A basic but thorough understanding of fundamental psychodynamic psychology is necessary for an effective group work experience in adult education classrooms. Understanding of a basic psychodynamic concept such as transference, by adult educators, can go a long way in reducing tension that surrounds a student’s reaction to the
instructor or to other group members. Educators can be experienced as authority figures from the student’s past. The past experience may have been pleasant or unpleasant. An awareness that transference might account for a strong reaction on the part of the student toward the instructor, will help instructors respond in a way that manages tension rather than escalates the situation. During group work students are often in close contact with other students and situations that can trigger psychodynamic forces. If the adult educator is a psychodynamically aware group facilitator, the learning and nature of the group experience are improved.

Adult educators may be more comfortable accepting the fact that some aspects of group work are beyond their control if they adopt a more complete and sophisticated view of what can be achieved through group work. Group work is a complex but important aspect of education. An acceptance of the complexity of group work and an awareness that there may be conflict as opposed to being surprised when trouble arises is essential to include in our way of thinking about groups in the classroom. Foley (1992) maintains:

For around two decades the way adult educators look at teaching and group work has been dominated by a combination of an instrumentalism which assumes that teachers can control students’ learning, and a version of humanistic psychology which sees learning groups as fundamentally healthy and potentially self-directing organisms, and group leaders as facilitators of the emergence of natural, positive tendencies in groups. (p. 143)

In reality, groups are complex and result in both positive and negative outcomes.
If practitioners maintain an open approach to learning, rather than trying to control unexpected outcomes, it is possible to view unforeseen situations as opportunities for learning. According to Clark and Dirkx (2002) “Rather than seeing some aspects of our beings as needing to be reduced or eliminated, we might approach these various qualities as innate aspects of who we are” (p. 112). If this statement is applied to group work, actions that are sometimes interpreted as right, wrong, or mysterious, may be understood in other ways.

In adult education classrooms it is necessary for educators to reflect on instructional goals regarding group work. Consideration of what is important for the learners to experience in the group and knowledge of the instructional objectives desired as the outcome of group work is essential. Clarity of group purpose serves as a guide to group facilitators about when to intercede, when not to intercede, when to clarify, and when to allow the group members to clarify. In other words, with task clarity group facilitators can more confidently calculate and gauge the impact of their interventions or of not intervening. To accomplish certain goals such as task completion, delving into the psychodynamics of the group process may divert learning and distract students so that task completion is not achieved. An alternative would be for the adult educator to allow time or create space after task completion to discuss and process the psychodynamic forces that affected the group.

The concept of group-as-a-whole should be factored into the interactions between adult educators and group members. Patterns of behavior are present from inception of the group. Educators must put in time acutely observing group dynamics with a psychodynamic lens in order to become acquainted with the group’s typical way of
interacting. Ringer (2000) maintains, “However, if a group leader is finely attuned to him or her self and the group and thus introduces an activity as a result of careful consideration, then some powerful learning can occur” (p. 187). Because groups often do not follow linear and rational influences that result in predictable outcomes, time spent gaining an awareness of group patterns can improve group function.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

RESEARCH OVERVIEW DISTRIBUTED TO PARTICIPANTS AT FIRST MEETING

(Printed on University of Georgia letterhead)
Research Overview

• What is the study about?

This study is aimed at increasing our understanding of how groups work together when engaged in an educational task. Also, I am interested in learning how our personal histories affect the group process. My report will be strictly confidential and pseudonyms will be used to mask the identity of the group members and the university. I will do everything, within my power, not to interfere with the normal operating procedures of the group nor should the completion of your degree requirements within the established timeline be affected by your participation in the study.

• What am I asking the group to do?

1. I would like to sit in on group work and planning sessions in order to observe the group dynamics and process of the group while you are engaged in analyzing and developing the findings of your group thesis study.

2. I would like to hold 3 private interviews with each group member about their group experiences. Each interview will last 1 hour.

• What’s in it for you?

1. Unfortunately, this is an unfunded project and I will not be able to pay you what your time is worth. However, I understand how valuable your time is and would like to give you a token of my appreciation. As soon as you agree to participate, I will give you a $15 gift certificate to Wal-Mart. In addition, I will pay you each $15 for each personal interview.

At the end of the study I will give you a summary of my report on the group interactions. Hopefully, the findings from this research will be helpful to you as you continue your educational endeavor.
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM
Consent Form

Study Title: The Influence of Early Life Experiences on the Adult Learning Group

I, ____________________, agree to take part in a research study titled “The Influence of Early Life Experiences on the Adult Learning Group”, which is being conducted by Janice Saturday, Department of Adult Education at the University of Georgia, phone: (706)613-0495 under the direction of Dr. Thomas Valentine, Department of Adult Education at the University of Georgia, phone: (706)542-2214. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I may, at any time, decide to withdraw from participation in the study without penalty or reservation. I can also choose to have the results of my participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, be removed from the research record and destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of early life experiences on the adult learning group. The potential benefits for the participant is that he/she may gain insight into issues related to group work. While some participants may find the subject sensitive and feel slightly uncomfortable with some of the questions, I understand that no risk to my person or to me is foreseen from my participation in this study.

My participation, in this study, may involve two interviews that will last approximately one hour each. The interviews will be taped for data analysis purposes. The audiotapes will be stored under the close supervision of the researchers and no one, other than the researcher, will have access to this information. All audiotapes will be destroyed on May 1, 2004. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with me will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with my permission or as required by law.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706)613-0495. My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

____________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Researcher     Date

Researcher's phone number (706)613-0495 and email: jsaturda@uga.edu

____________________________________  ______________________
Signature of Participant              Date

For questions or problems about your rights please call or write: Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706)542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu
APPENDIX C

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA SHEET

(Completed by Participants before First Interview)
Biographical Data

Interviewer:

Date of Interview:

Participant:

Age:

Sex:

Race:

Education:

Employment:

Marital status (history):

Family (history):

Children:
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE ABOUT GROUP HISTORY
Interview about Group History

Tell me about the group, including the purpose of the group, in which you are currently a member.

Tell me about the make up of the group in which you are currently a member.

Describe Kim as a group member. Describe Beth as a group member. Do you consider Dr. Schell a group member?

Tell me about the general atmosphere of the group in which you are currently a member.

Tell me about the most productive and harmonious time in the group setting.

Tell me about the least productive time when the most conflict was present in the group.

Tell me how the group is different now than it was in the beginning.
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THESIS SUPERVISOR
Interview Guide for Dr. Smith

Tell me about the history of the group.

What role do you play in this group?

Have you seen any significant conflict in this group?

Who runs this group?

Tell me about: Julia’s relationship with Kate

   Julia’s relationship with Renee

   Kate’s relationship with Julia

   Kate’s relationship with Renee

   Renee’s relationship with Julia

   Renee’s relationship with Kate

Have any group members talked about home or traumatic experiences from the past?
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SECOND INTERVIEW WITH JULIA
In the first interview I spent a lot of time on at school conversation and interactions among the 3 group members. I have to realize that a relationship spills over outside of school hours. Can you give me an idea for how much you have a relationship with Renee/Kate outside of the classroom, whether it’s a telephone relationship or a go to lunch relationship or whatever that might be. How often do you talk on the phone? What kind of things do you talk about?

Groups from the past, from an earlier time in your life. Maybe your family (your twin sister and younger brother, or a group in elementary school or high school).

How do you feel that the other group members value you? How valued did you feel in your family compared to your sister and brother?

How are you important to the group? How were you important in your family group?

In the first interview you described yourself in the group by saying, A lot of times I’ll sit back and not say things. I worried too much about what people think about me is why I hold back and don’t say anything. Have there been other times in your life when you “sit back and don’t say things and worried about what people think about you”?

Can you think of something that happened early in your life that might have led to this? To what do you attribute this to?

I’ve noticed some tension and concern among the group around the practitioner, Linda Stevens, will you tell me more about that? Have you ever felt like this before maybe when you were a little girl?

What do you most fear? Tell me about a time when you were fearful in a group (earlier).

What have been the important developments since the last time I observed the group. When might be a good time for me to come observe the group again?
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SECOND INTERVIEW WITH KATE
In the first interview I spent a lot of time on at school conversation and interactions among the 3 group members. I have to realize that a relationship spills over outside of school hours. Can you give me an idea for how much you have a relationship with Renee/Julia outside of the classroom, whether it’s a telephone relationship or a go to lunch relationship or whatever that might be. How often do you talk on the phone? What kind of things do you talk about?

Groups from the past, from an earlier time in your life. Maybe your family (your older sister, or a group in elementary school or high school).

How do you feel that the other group members value you? How valued did you feel in your family compared to your sister?

How are you important to the group? How were you important in your family group?

In the first interview you described yourself in the group by saying, 1) I’m not afraid to bring up an idea and not be offended when they say no. I’m very open minded. Have there been other times in your life when you “felt open minded” and how that worked? 2)When I asked you to imagine if you were supervising a group that was in conflict you said, “Definitely not one on one. I wouldn’t tell how to resolve it, I would mediate and hope they come to resolution – I think it is very important that they work it out themselves”. Have there been times in your life, say with you and your older sister were in conflict when you saw conflict resolved in this way (not one on one, worked out among yourselves). 3) Last time you described your main role as, “Hopefully as an encourager. It’s going to be OK.” Is there another time when you have been in this role, say in your family or in a group in high school or elementary school?

Can you think of something that happened early in your life that might have led to this? To what do you attribute this to?

I’ve noticed some tension and concern among the group around the practitioner, Linda Stevens, will you tell me more about that? Have you ever felt like this before maybe when you were a little girl?

What do you most fear? Tell me about a time when you were fearful in a group (earlier).

What have been the important developments since the last time I observed the group. When might be a good time for me to come observe the group again?
APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SECOND INTERVIEW WITH RENEE
In the first interview I spent a lot of time on at school conversation and interactions among the 3 group members. I have to realize that a relationship spills over outside of school hours. Can you give me an idea for how much you have a relationship with Julia/Kate outside of the classroom, whether it’s a telephone relationship or a go to lunch relationship or whatever that might be. How often do you talk on the phone? What kind of things do you talk about?

Groups from the past, from an earlier time in your life. Tell me about the group, focus on the group. Maybe your family (your older brother, or a group in elementary school or high school).

How do you feel that the other group members value you? How valued did you feel in your family compared to your brother?

How are you important to the group? How were you important in your family group?

In the first interview you described yourself in the group by saying, 1) “I’m a big planner. I plan everything.” Can you think of something that happened early in your life that might have led to this?

2) “I’m also, they call me the mediator.” Tell me about other times in your life when you have been the mediator, say in your family or in high school or elementary school.

3) “I don’t want to be in the middle. I don’t want to take a side.”

To what do you attribute this to? Have there been times earlier in your life when you felt that you were in the middle or had to take a side?

I’ve noticed some tension and concern among the group around the practitioner, Linda Stevens, will you tell me more about that? Have you ever felt like this before maybe in another group or in your family?

What do you most fear? Tell me about a time when you were fearful in a group (earlier).

What have been the important developments since the last time I observed the group. When might be a good time for me to come observe the group again?

3rd interview – Tuesday, March 18 at 1:00pm
APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THIRD INTERVIEW WITH JULIA
Have you had any thoughts about our last interview?

You know this is our last interview so I want to move right in on what I consider the most important stuff. You might remember that my study is entitled, “The Influence of Early Life Experiences on the Adult Learning Group.” I’m interested in the connection between what goes on in a classroom and what goes on in other parts of you life. I have a theory that what goes on with people in groups has a lot to do with what goes on in their families earlier. For example, in my own life, I find that I don’t do very well with conflict in a classroom because I come from a family that didn’t do very well with conflict. We had other ways of dealing with disagreement, we would do it indirectly. That’s my story that may not be your story. Let me tell you what I want to do today. I’ve studied the transcripts and things you’ve told me about the group and about your home and I have some quotes that I’d like to base the interview around. So let’s look at these quotes that I think can help us think about this and you can tell me whether you think this is true or not.

In our last interview you pointed out that you made a suggestion for the thesis article - to transfer your whole Ch. 2 and then delete out the things - the group didn’t seem to hear your suggestion, but they heard the suggestion when somebody else offered it. Do you remember the incident? Do you think I have that right? Do you think there’s any connection between that and anything that might have happened to you in your early years, either at home, in your family or in school?

In our last interview you remembered that you and one of the other group members had a disagreement that didn’t have anything to do with thesis (it was a personal matter). You could tell for several weeks after that that she was still mad about it. You were the one that called her back and said that you were wrong even though you didn’t believe that. Is that accurate? Do you think there’s any connection between that and anything that might have happened to you in your early years?

You talked about your mother by saying “we always go to my mom when we need something. My mom is I don’t know what it is about her, but she’s always been our comfort zone. We also know that if something needs to get done my mom will do it.” Do you remember this and the things you talked about? Do you think there’s any connection between that and what you do when you’re in the group? Does that affect the way you react to others in the group?

In first interview you mentioned your biggest fear related to the group is “graduating, going out there, and starting to work. Not knowing as much as I think I need to.”
Do you think there’s any connection between that and what might have happened to you in your early years?
Does that affect you as a learner?
APPENDIX J

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THIRD INTERVIEW WITH KATE
Have you had any thoughts about our last interview?

You know this is our last interview so I want to move right in on what I consider the most important stuff. You might remember that my study is entitled, “The Influence of Early Life Experiences on the Adult Learning Group.” I’m interested in the connection between what goes on in a classroom and what goes on in other parts of your life. I have a theory that what goes on with people in groups has a lot to do with what goes on in their families earlier. For example, in my own life, I find that I don’t do very well with conflict in a classroom because I come from a family that didn’t do very well with conflict. We had other ways of dealing with disagreement, we would do it indirectly. That’s my story that may not be your story. Let me tell you what I want to do today. I’ve studied the transcripts and things you’ve told me about the group and about your home and I have some quotes that I’d like to base the interview around. So let’s look at these quotes that I think can help us think about this and you can tell me whether you think this is true or not.

In the last interview you told me about a time where you and your family members were working together, you were about 8 or 10 years old. You would become distracted by animals or checking the mail. Your behavior frustrated your sister and your mom set up a rule that you would be paid for how you worked. Do you remember talking about that? Is that accurate? Do you think there’s any connection between that incident and what you do when you’re in the group?

You told me about another time related to your family in the last interview. When you and Jessica and your mother would drive somewhere, who sat in the front seat was an issue for a while. Your mom resolved it this particular time by having both, you and Jessica sit in the back. From then on you automatically sat in the back. Is this right? Does that affect you now? Does that affect you as a learner or you as a group member?

Last time you also talked about playing on a high school basketball team. Can you talk about how that experience might play out in the way you interact in the group?

Still related to the basketball experience, you talked about feeling during high school that your varsity coach was biased toward some people but in looking back he played the more skilled players and they got the job done. Do you remember? How has that affected you as a learner? Did that affect you as a group member or how you interact in a group?
In the last interview when you talked about the little tiffs between you and your sister. You talked about how you handled things that you disagree on like picking the onion out of the spaghetti that you sister prepared. And if the conflict became too bad your mom would tell you to go do something else, Jessica would usually go to her room and you would go outside and play. You stated, “I think I tried to avoid conflict in most cases.” Does this carry over into the classroom or how you interact in the group?

Last time you also talked about how your faith has affected your attitude. You said your attitude shifted. You picked up the role of encourager and a positive person. How has that affected you as a learner?

In thinking about what you fear most last time, you mentioned taking & passing your board exam. Do you think there’s any connection between that and anything that might have happened to you in your early years?
APPENDIX K

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THIRD INTERVIEW WITH RENEE
Have you had any thoughts about our last interview?

You know this is our last interview. So I want to move right on to what I consider the most important stuff. The title of my study is “The Influence of Early Life Experiences on Adult Learning Groups.” So I’m interested in the connection between what goes on in the classroom or an adult learning group and what goes on in other parts of our lives. I have a theory that what goes on with people in groups has a lot to do with what went on in our early family, like what they’ve seen modeled in the family group. For example, in my own life I find that I don’t do very well with conflict in a group or in a classroom because my family didn’t do very well with conflict. We had other ways of dealing with disagreement, those were very indirect ways, it wasn’t openly, it was through indirect methods.

So this is what I’d like for us to do today. I’ve studied the transcripts and some of the things you’ve told me about the group and about your early life experiences and I have some quotes that I’d like to base the interview around. So let’s look at these quotes and I’m hoping that you can help me make some of these connections or whether you think there is not a connection.

In the last interview you talked about playing soccer for many years. Can you talk about how that experience might affect how you interact in a group today?

In the last interview when I asked how you acquired your interest in soccer you said, “I wanted to do everything my brother wanted to do.” How did that affect you as a learner then and now?

In the last interview you said, “I want to work but I want an equal balance of work and real life and play.” Can you connect this desire for balance to something in your early life? Does this affect the way you interact in a group or in the classroom?

When talking about how you act when you get mad, you said, “I’m quiet. I won’t talk. I don’t ever usually yell, but that’s how my husband knows I’m mad, is if I won’t talk. It drives him nuts. Which is bad and I’ve just realized, like over the past couple of months, because that’s the way I’ve grown up. If you have something positive to say you’re more than welcome to say it, but when you have something negative, like you don’t like this, you were never encouraged to say that, which I don’t really agree with but so I’m working on changing that. “

Do you remember this – is this accurate?

Do you think this had anything to do with how you interact in a group or in the classroom today?
A recent experience that you mentioned in the last interview was a situation with your first CI in field work. Do you remember this? You mentioned that the CI expected you to know things that you had not encountered yet and she told the field work coordinator that you didn’t communicate well and that you needed to be assertive with her. Is this accurate? Can you connect this rather recent experience with a pattern or experiences from your early life? Do you think there’s any connection between that and what you do when you’re in a group or in the classroom?