

Working Alliance and Group Climate in Group Supervision

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Abstract

This study took the concept of working alliance and group climate and applied it to a group supervisor-supervisee relationship in the HOPE Couples Counseling Project. Participants completed a working alliance measure and a group climate measure. Overall, the mean scores showed that people progressed from perceiving the group climate as moderately engaging to quite a bit engaging by the end of the semester. Conflict was perceived as either not being present at all or a little present as the groups progressed. The level of perceived avoidance ranged from somewhat present to moderately present and remained relatively constant. Correlations between the Engaged, Conflict, and Avoidance Scales and the WAI-c were calculated at both Time 2 and Time 3. These correlations showed that as the group becomes more engaged and experiences less tension and anger, the working alliance improves.

Introduction

The working alliance, also referred to as the working relationship or the therapeutic alliance, is a bond between the therapist and client (Hatcher & Barends, 2006; Horvath & Bedi, 2002). It is both participants knowing that they care about each other and are working towards a common goal (Kokotovic & Tracey, 1990). There are three components of the working alliance that establish the value of the helping relationship: client and therapist agreement on goals of treatment, agreement on the tasks to meet the goals, and the establishment of a personal bond between client and therapist (Bordin, 1976; Horvath & Greenberg, 1994).

A collaborative approach to treatment, in which the client and therapist work together, is crucial for positive therapeutic outcomes (Hatcher & Barends). Numerous meta-analyses have demonstrated that developing a solid working alliance, particularly in the early phases of therapy, is strongly correlated with therapy outcomes (Gelso & Carter, 1985; Horvath & Bedi, 2002; Martin et al., 2000). Since working alliances influence outcomes in therapy, they also can potentially influence outcomes in group supervision. However, this is not something that has been examined.

In conjunction with working alliance, group climate also plays a significant role in treatment outcomes. In the present study, working alliance and group climate were measured to assess the level of satisfaction with peer group supervision in the Regent University HOPE Couples Project. Results of the study were used to make recommendations and ultimately help improve the provision of peer group supervision in the Regent University HOPE Couples Project.

Method

All individuals involved with the supervision groups of the HOPE Couples Research Project at Regent University were asked to participate: supervisors, therapists, and clinical assessment specialists. The total number of participants was 44. There were 36 females and 8 males. Eight of the participants were supervisors, 21 were therapists, and 15 were clinical assessment specialists.

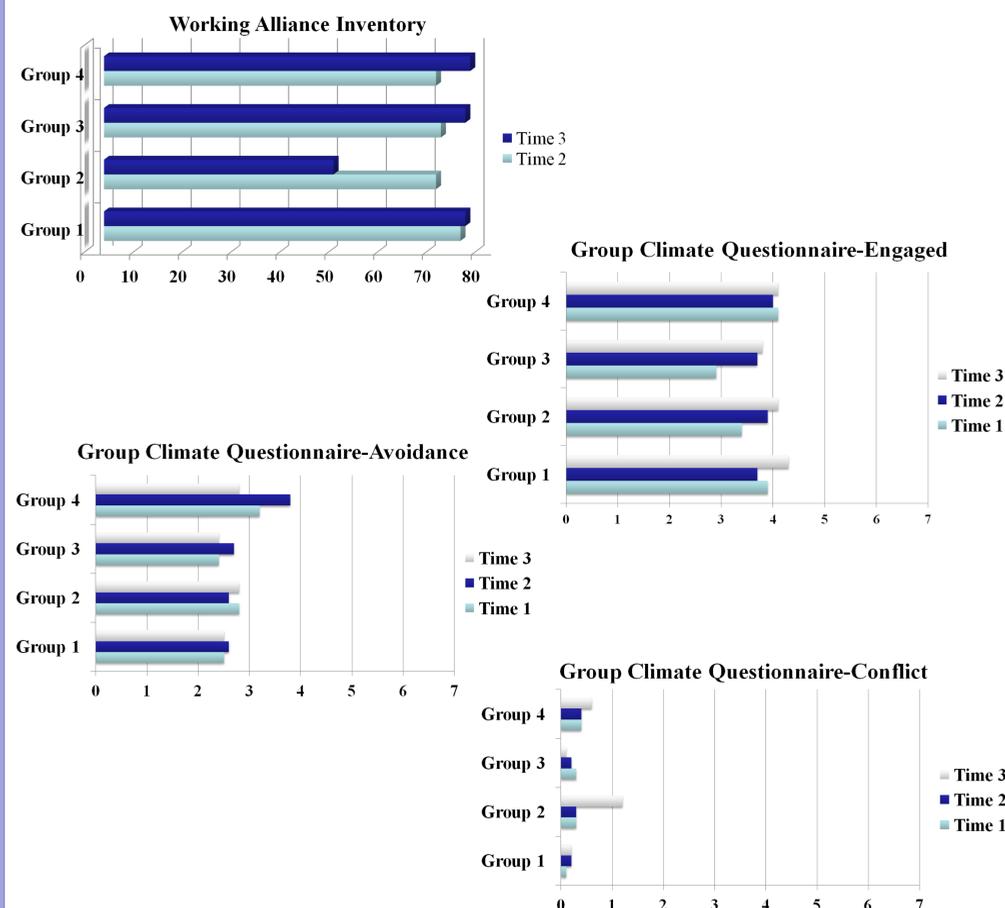
The Group Climate Questionnaire-Short Form (GCQ-S) and the Working Alliance Inventory-Short Form (WAI-c) were used in this study (Horvath & Greenberg 1989; MacKenzie, 1981). The GCQ-S yields three scores with the highest possible score being 7 and the lowest being 0: engaged, conflict, and avoidance. To make the WAI-c applicable to this study, the questions were modified to reflect the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee, instead of the relationship between therapist and client. The WAI-c yields one general score (from 7-84) that represents the working alliance.

All individuals whom agreed to participate in the study signed an informed consent form. The GCQ-S was completed by everyone at the beginning of supervision groups in September, at midpoint in October, and at the end of the semester in November. Only the therapists completed the WAI-c at Time 2 and 3.

Results

Descriptive statistics were used to look at results of the GCQ-S and the WAI-c specific to each of the four supervision groups. The mean for each group at Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3 was calculated for the GCQ-S scores of Engaged, Conflict, and Avoidance. Overall, the mean scores showed that people progressed from perceiving the group climate as moderately engaging to quite a bit engaging by the end of the semester. Conflict was perceived as either not being present at all or a little present as the groups progressed. The only group that conflict was even rated as being a little present was Group 2 at Time 3. The level of perceived avoidance ranged from somewhat present to moderately present and remained relatively constant.

Correlations between the Engaged, Conflict, and Avoidance Scales and the WAI-c were calculated at Time 2 and Time 3. Only two emerged as significant. At Time 2 the GCQ-S-Engaged and the WAI-c were positively correlated ($p=.010$) and at Time 3 the GCQ-S-Conflict and the WAI-c were negatively correlated ($p<.001$).



Conclusions

Overall, as the semester progressed, supervision groups became more engaged, while the level of avoidance remained relatively constant throughout the semester. As avoidance was only perceived as being somewhat to moderately present, this is not surprising, as the groups had only been together for approximately 3 months. In addition, conflict was only rated as a little present at Time 3 in one of the four supervision groups. Overall, working alliance remained strong throughout the semester. The only group that decreased in working alliance was Group 2, the same group where the conflict was perceived as a little present, thus likely accounting for the drop in working alliance.

At Time 2 the GCQ-S-Engaged and the WAI-c were positively correlated and at Time 3 the GCQ-S-Conflict and the WAI-c were negatively correlated. Theoretically, these correlations make sense, as the group becomes more engaged and experiences less tension and conflict the working alliance improves. Interestingly that these correlations did not occur at both Time 2 and Time 3. A small number of participants and missing data at different points likely played a part in this difference.

This study took the concept of a working alliance and applied it to a group supervisor-supervisee relationship. The nature of supervision in HOPE Couples Counseling Project offered a platform to get a sense of the group climate and alliance with supervisor-supervisees. Just as there are benefits to examining the alliance between client and counselor, so there can be benefits when examining group climate and alliance within group supervision relationships. Groups provide a natural platform to process what is happening between members (Yalom, 2005). This study opens the door to considering that the same dynamics can be examined within group supervision with supervisee-supervisor. By having these types of groups, supervisees grow as clinicians, and also learn the importance of managing certain dynamics in a group setting.

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