



Unleashing the Power of Group Therapy for Women with Sexual Concerns

Lyndsey Fraser, MA, LMFT and
Amanda Holmberg, MS, LMFT

Why Group Therapy?

- Community
 - Participating in group psychotherapy gives clients a sense of community and often do not feel as alone in their problems when hearing others with similar difficulties.
- Seeing how others do it
 - Members see others facing the same obstacles and gain renewed strength seeing others handle various aspects well.
- Self-Worth
 - Assisting others helps members feel valuable
- Cost effective
 - Much less than individual treatment!

Ethics in Group Therapy

Responsibility to Patient/Client

- 1. The group psychotherapist provides services with respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each patient/client as well as the rights and autonomy of the individual patient/client.
 - *1.1 The group psychotherapist shall provide the potential group patient/client with information about the nature of group psychotherapy and apprise him or her of the risks, rights and obligations as a member of a therapy group.*
 - *1.2 The group psychotherapist shall encourage the patient/client's participation in group psychotherapy only so long as it is appropriate to the patient/client's needs.*
 - *1.3 The group psychotherapist shall not practice or condone any form of discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin or physical handicap, except that this guideline shall not prohibit group therapy practice with population specific or problem specific groups.*

Ethics In Group Therapy (cont.)

- 2. The group psychotherapist safeguards the patient/client's right to privacy by judiciously protecting information of a confidential nature.
 - *2.1 The group shall agree that the patient/client as well as the psychotherapist shall protect the identity of its members.*
 - *2.2 The group therapist is knowledgeable about the limits of privileged communication as they apply to group therapy and informs group members of those limits.*
 - *2.3 The group psychotherapist shall not use identifiable information about the group or its members for teaching purposes, publication or professional presentations unless permission has been obtained and all measures have been taken to preserve patient/client anonymity.*
 - *2.4 Except where required by law, the group psychotherapist shall share information about the group members with others only after obtaining appropriate patient/client consent. Specific permission must be requested to permit conferring with the referring therapist or with the individual therapist where the patient/client is in conjoint therapy.*
 - *2.5 When clinical examination suggests that a patient/client may be dangerous to himself/herself or others, it is the group psychotherapist's ethical and legal obligation to take appropriate steps in order to be responsible to society in general, as well as the patient/client.*

Ethics In Group Therapy (cont.)

- 3. The group psychotherapist acts to safeguard the patient/client and the public from the incompetent, unethical, illegal practice of any group psychotherapist.
 - *3.1 The group psychotherapist must be aware of her/his own individual competencies, and when the needs of the patient/client are beyond the competencies of the psychotherapist, consultation must be sought from other qualified professionals or other appropriate sources.*
 - *3.2 The group psychotherapist shall not use her/his professional relationship to advance personal or business interests.*
 - *3.3 Sexual intimacy with patients/clients is unethical.*
 - *3.4 The group psychotherapist shall protect the patient/client and the public from misinformation and misrepresentation. She/he shall not use false or misleading advertising regarding her/his qualifications or skills as a group psychotherapist.*

Ethics In Group Therapy (cont.)

Professional Standards

- The group psychotherapist shall maintain the integrity of the practice of group psychotherapy.
- *1. It is the personal responsibility of the group psychotherapist to maintain competence in the practice of group psychotherapy through formal educational activities and informal learning experiences.*
- *2. The group psychotherapist has a responsibility to contribute to the ongoing development of the body of knowledge pertaining to group psychotherapy whether involved as an investigator, participant or user of research results.*
- *3. The group psychotherapist shall accept the obligation to attempt to inform and alert other group psychotherapists who are violating ethical principles or to bring those violations to the attention of appropriate professional authorities.*
- *(Revised, February 2002)*

Research outcomes of group therapy with Women

The Development of Empathy.

- “Empathy is the capacity to learn to “see” the other and to make oneself know to the other (which) highlights one’s own self-knowledge and fosters growth in the other and the self (Gagerman, Ph.D, LCSW, BCD pg.288)
- “The mutual empathy, attunement, and response to each others inner lives allows for further growth and connection” (Gagerman, PhD, LCSW, BCD pg. 288)
- “Self-in Relation” model of therapy. “...psychological health is maintained throughout the life span by staying connected to others mutually empathic relationships, rather than the traditional view of becoming autonomous and independent (Gagerman, PhD, LCSW, BCD pg. 291)”

Intersubjectivity

- “An interest in, and attention to the other person. Which forms the base of emotional connection and ability to empathize with the other (Gagerman, PhD, LCSW, BCD)”.
- “An expectation of a mutual empathic process wher the sharing of experience leads to heightened development of the self and the other (Gagerman, PhD, LCSW, BCD)”.
- “The expectation of interaction and reationship as a process of mutual/sensitivity and mutual responsibility which provides the structure for growth of empowerment and self knowledge (Gagerman, PhD, LCSW, BCD)”.

Mindfulness Based Group Therapy

- One research study looked at combining Mindfulness based therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy (MBCST) to treat women who had concerns with desire
 - The researchers look at the integration of psychoeducation about sexual response and elements of cognitive based therapy together with in session practice of mindfulness.
 - In comparison with the control group (delayed treatment) researchers found that a 4 session group mindfulness based therapy significantly improved sexual desire, arousal, lubrication, satisfaction, and overall sexual functioning.
 - Genital excitement, pleasure, and tingling also improved.

Why Does Mindfulness Based Therapy Work Well With Sexual Concerns?

- Mindfulness encourages us to pay attention to the present moment in a non-judgemental way; something that can often be hard for those struggling with a sexual concern.
- Practicing mindfulness during the day can help us be more present to noticing sexual cues of desire and arousal
- Practicing mindfulness with intimacy can:
 - Encourage us to stay in the present moment of sexual stimuli and sexual arousal
 - Help us minimize distractions and criticisms: treat anxious thoughts as “mental events” that do not need to be believed or pursued.

How is a group/Workshop structured with the ISIS Model?

- Group Rules/Confidentiality
- Ice breaking activities
- Objects in Wheel
- Description of sexual health model/ISIS Model
- Discuss each pathway with a group exercise
- Self pleasure
- Sexuality in relation to a partner
- Closing Activities

Group Rules/Confidentiality

- Facilitators go over informed consent of group therapy. Leaders also ask for a show of hands for confidentiality.
- Group Rules/Communication Guidelines
- Support vs feedback
- Listening skills
- Making sure everyone has a chance to speak
- Anyone can take a break at any time
- How to bring up hurt by something said

Creating Safety Within the group

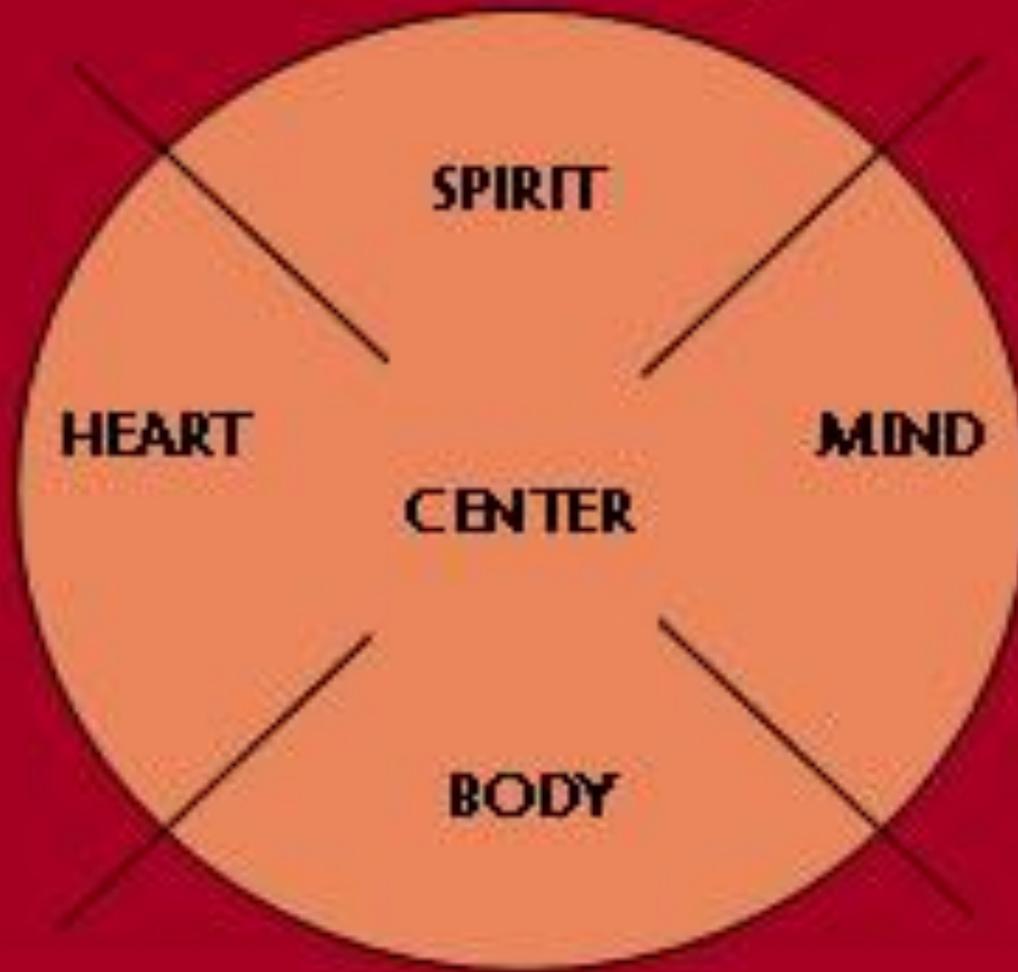
Grounding: guided medication

- Fear in a hat exercise

The ISIS Model History

- Developed by Gina Ogden, PhD through her Integrating Sexuality and Spirituality (ISIS) survey that was sent out in 1997.
- Gina Ogden wanted to explore sexual experiences from a sexuality with spirituality perspective. Taking the models away from the performance models that were dominating the field at the time.

ISIS Wheel of Sexual Experience



Example of ISIS Wheel in Group with Objects



Objects in the Wheel

- Each member lights a candle and blows her name into the wheel showing her participation in the group.
- Each member then goes around and places their two objects (Participants asked ahead of time to bring object)
 - One object is the part of her sexual story she would like to grow and expand.
 - One object is the part of her sexual story she would like to release and move beyond.

Examples of objects: Crock pots, sex books, underwear, mirrors, rocks, condoms, pet collars, lentils, old tee-shirt, letters that the client has written, vibrators, makeup, pocket knives, bottle openers, matches.

Emotional Path



- ***The path of passion and compassion:*** A full range of feelings—love, passion, longing, anger, and fear. Whatever touches the heart. Empathy—the ability to feel what others feel. Compassion: the Dalai Lama describes this as the ability to love yourself and others no matter how conflicted your feelings may be. Trust—the ability to let go of control. The emotional ISIS experience is characterized by open-heartedness and heightened feelings.
- ***...and the path of fear and anger:*** The emotional quadrant is also the container of so-called dark feelings: anger, fear, angst, disgust, and any emotions that are the fallout from sexual experiences that were disappointing, controlling, scary, painful, violent, abusive, or just plain boring.
- Taken from Gina Ogden's Website describing each path, www.ginaogden.com/isis-wheel/

Group Activity for the Emotional Path: *Ad for a Lover*

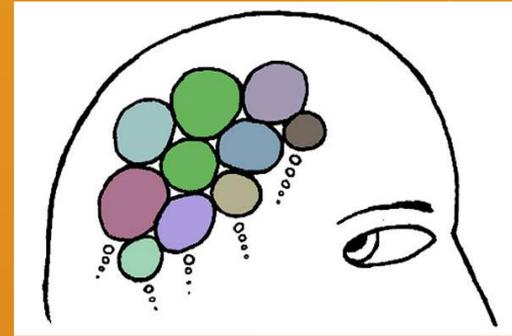
- Ad for a Lover Exercise (Gina Ogden, Expanding the Practice of Sex Therapy, Pg. 50)
- Write an ad for the perfect lover-for you-a lover who fills your desires of body, mind, heart and spirit.
- Group Calls out in popcorn style or small groups share on a white board.

Ad for a Lover exercise small groups

- Break off into groups of 4
- Create Ad for Lover: as if you are writing an ad for a newspaper or dating site.
 - Include how this lover would fill your desires of mind, body, and soul.
- Return to big group and share ad.



Mental Path

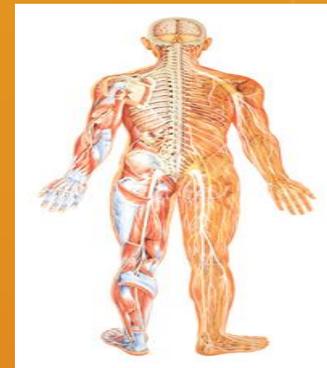


- The path of discernment & choice: beliefs and messages about both sexuality and spirituality—including religious messages, imagination, intuition, memory, and dreams. The mental quadrant is characterized by an open mind, increased understanding, expanded beliefs, and letting go of judgments about what sex should be.
- It can also be the path of judgment, shame, and guilt: constructs instilled by society, religion, or community often leave us fearing or feeling shameful about sex.

Group Exercise for Mental Path: *Retrofitting your sexual messages*

- Small Groups of 2-3
- What messages did you receive about sex, pleasure, and intimacy when growing up and/or throughout your life?
- How do you find yourself incorporating those messages into your life today?
- What are the messages you want to keep?
- What are the messages you want to let go of
- What is the first step towards making some of these changes?

Physical Path



- **The path of sensation:** A full range of sensory experience—smell, taste, touch, sight, and hearing. Movement and stillness. Comfort and safety. Arousal, orgasm, and other physical pleasures. The physical ISIS experience is characterized by heightened senses—brighter colors; increased sensitivity to touch, taste, smell and hearing; exquisite awareness of how all parts of the body connect to all the senses.
- **...and the path of sexual dysfunction:** The physical quadrant also includes issues such as pain, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), disease, disability, distorted body image, and sexual dysfunction, including the dysfunctions that are listed in the DSM, such as anorgasmia, vaginismus, erectile dysfunction, and premature, delayed, and retrograde ejaculation.
- Taken from Gina Ogden's Website describing each path, www.ginaogden.com/isis-wheel/

Group Exercise for Physical Path

- Turn off and Turn on Regarding Five Senses
- Group members describe what turns them off and on regarding the five senses in a group format popcorn style.
 - Smell
 - Taste
 - Touch
 - Hearing
 - Seeing

The Spiritual Path



- The path of connection and meaning: a deep sense of connection with one's self, one's partner, and/or a higher power. The spiritual path is characterized by ecstasy, increased energy, lasting satisfaction, and transcendence.
- It can also be the path of disconnection and over control: the spiritual quadrant is the container for a variety of irrational facts about sexuality. Anything that leaves participants feelings disconnected and out of control should be explored.

The Spiritual Path Exercise

- Read poem/story/saying to group
- Guest House poem
- Eye gazing activity

The Center Path or Intergration

- The place of integration and transformation: As you near the very center of the ISIS Wheel you enter a kind of high-definition Oz where everything seems vibrantly colored. It may feel like a place of mystery and paradox where opposites merge in an uncanny way. The experience of the Center differs from person to person and time to time. It is totally subjective, and yours to define for yourself. You may experience opposites, oneness and integration, shape shifting, and timelessness. You may experience extraordinary light and lightness of being. You may find yourself communing profoundly with your partner and with yourself. Each journey to the Center can encompass your whole life. There's no past and no future here, only a greatly expanded now. It's a place of clarity and vision, of vastness, of unconditional love.

The Center Path or Integration continued

- and the shadow side, when sex falls apart: When physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual experience meet they can blow our circuits, especially if there is unresolved density and negativity. This is the shadow side of the Center—the experience of pain and repression of pain, the feared and the unexplored. This is the agony of despair, the terror of sexual violence and abuse, the burden of shame, guilt, loneliness, isolation—and dysfunction. This shadow place can be a place of dissociation, as well as of association. One client calls it “the valley of the shadow of death.” How we can move from this place to a sense of vibrant sexuality is the subject of my trainings and my books.

Closing Ceremony for Group

- Invite each participant to
 - Reclaim their object
 - Tell the group what they learned by working with these objects
 - Share ideas they have about moving forward
 - Share what they will do with their objects when they get home
 - Blow out your candle and blow gratitude into the circle
 - Take one last walk around the wheel

Resources

- Websites:

 - <http://www.expandingsextherapy.com/>

 - <http://www.ginaogden.com/>

- Books:

 - Ogden, G. (2013) *Expanding the Practice of Sex Therapy*.

 - Ogden, G (2006) *Heart and Soul of Sex: Exploring the Sexual Mysteries*.

- Articles:

 - Gagerman, J.R. (2004). The Search for Fuller Mutuality and Self Experiences in a Women's Psychotherapy Group. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 32(3), 285-306.