

Making Connections

Finding Your Place
in the Lesbian and Gay Community

A Manual for Group Facilitators

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The Lesbian/Gay Program provides short to medium term professional counselling to individuals, couples, families, as well as group services, to lesbians, gay men and related communities. Our counselling helps people face a broad range of issues including coming out, sexuality and identity, isolation, discrimination, relationship concerns, parenting, self-esteem, and violence. Fees are on a sliding scale based on income.

The HIV/AIDS Program provides short and long-term professional counselling to individuals, couples and families living with, or affected by HIV/AIDS, on issues such as loss, relationships, self-esteem, trauma, planning for healthy living, changing health status, self-care, and impact on sexuality. We provide referrals to other support services (such as financial, housing, treatment information, home care); advocacy on behalf of our clients; and home, hospital or hospice visits as required. There is no fee for service.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Manual

This manual is designed for use by gay and lesbian counsellors/group facilitators who are planning to offer groups to adult lesbian and gay clients. It is particularly useful for work with clients who are socially isolated and experiencing personal difficulties making connections with others in the larger gay and lesbian community.

This manual was developed from groups offered as a pilot project in the David Kelley Services. It was designed with a large urban setting in mind; facilitators from other settings would need to adjust accordingly to meet their specific group needs. This manual is intended as a general model for this kind of group, and facilitators are encouraged to adapt the information and exercises offered here. Throughout this manual there are examples of specific experiences which occurred during the pilot project groups.

Background and Rationale

This initiative evolved from the work of counsellors in the David Kelley Lesbian and Gay Community Counselling Program during the first three years of operation within the Family Service Association of Toronto.

Counsellors found a common denominator among the majority of adults seeking service was isolation and lack of community connection. The most significant contributor to continuing isolation throughout adulthood (when mental health concerns were ruled out) was internalized sexual shame or internalized homophobia. Internalized shame has been identified in our work and in the literature as a major deterrent to the formation and maintenance of healthy relationships with friends, lovers, family, and most importantly, self (Kaufman and Raphael 1996).

Internalized shame is experienced by all members of our society, regardless of sexual orientation. It is not unique to gays and lesbians. Gays and lesbians, however, experience it to a greater degree because of their sexual minority status.



We do not live in a sex-positive culture and “coming-out” requires looking directly at one’s beliefs, attitudes and values concerning sexuality. Through the “coming-out” process, the individual begins to recognize the extent to which our society is homophobic and heterosexist. Without support and connection one can become frozen in isolation.

Some clients seeking service from our program do so because of the experience of social isolation. Some clients have “coming-out” issues, for which there are community support groups. But for those experiencing ongoing social isolation, a “coming-out” group is not enough. A “coming-out” group cannot address the experience of those who have been “out”, even if only to themselves, and a few chosen others. They continue to have difficulties establishing gay and lesbian friendships and romantic relationships.

Our counsellors have noted that clients often remark how their first significant experience of connection is through a professional relationship with an “out” gay or lesbian counsellor. Indeed, even clients who have been “out” for many years often say they have not known other gays and lesbians visible in the larger heterosexual community, unless they were politicians or in the arts. The experience of coming to DKS, where our programs and employees are very visible within a larger, mainstream, predominantly heterosexual organization was unique and gave them their first experience of how the world could be if society were to uniformly accept our right to visibility.

“Coming-out” requires looking directly at one’s beliefs, attitudes and values concerning sexuality.

Some clients, more often lesbians, “came out” to self through a single relationship i.e. falling in love with someone of the same sex. Their relationship was often experienced, however, disconnected from the larger community where support may have been possible.

Pride of membership can act as a significant antidote to constant negative messages that our orientation is unacceptable and even destructive to the fabric of the current social order (Walters and Simoni 1993). However, to be “out” is to experience social censure and shaming from a myriad of sources both personal and societal, regardless of membership in community.

Withstanding the constant reminders that our right to existence and visibility depends upon the goodwill and support we may receive from the larger community that defines law and social policy is an ongoing personal challenge and a challenge to the families we create. This creates enormous stress which can eventually lead to personal and relationship conflicts.



Sexual shaming results in the experience of:

- ➔ Isolation
- ➔ Disenfranchisement
- ➔ Lack of experience with the unique facets of gay and lesbian love relationships and friendships
- ➔ A need for secrecy because of realistic fears that being visible will result in being treated as different

Regardless of changes in legal and social policy, each individual must face the unknown in terms of how they will be received and treated by schools, employers, social and healthcare services, straight friends, relatives, neighbours and strangers.

The group can be a laboratory for practicing self-disclosure, receiving feedback, and learning active listening skills.

This unknown can be a significant deterrent to taking those first steps toward a sense of pride and membership in community.

Although group counselling can address some of the intrapsychic factors which diminish individual confidence and belief that one will be able to withstand experiences of social censure, it cannot guarantee these experiences will not occur. However, learning skills to manage prejudice, as well as developing supportive links through group relationships, contributes greatly to the sense of being part of a community and therefore not alone in experiencing oppression. Group therapy can therefore be a forum to debunk stereotypes and nurture positive group identities (Walters and Simoni, 1993).

Living an isolated existence can also retard the development of healthy modes of communicating. Expecting censure or judgment can inhibit the expectation that one will be heard, respected, and understood. The group can be a laboratory for practicing self-disclosure, receiving feedback, and learning active listening skills.

Group psychotherapy can be a powerful tool to effect cognitive, affective and behavioural change in gay and lesbian client (Conlin and Smith, 1985). For many gay and lesbian adults experiencing difficulties, group psychotherapy has proven to be a preferable mode of treatment (Parker, 1996). Group therapy can be beneficial to the gay and lesbian client by offering an opportunity to experience social identification with other gays and lesbians, including the group leaders. Furthermore, the mutual respect and support available from other group members, and the therapeutic process of reality



testing can be extremely positive (Parker, 1996). Many gays and lesbians fear relationships and intimacy. Individual therapy alone may feel too threatening. This is not to say that group therapy on its own can offset all the intrapsychic issues which distress the client. Rather, it can work as a very effective adjunct to the experience of individual therapy assisting the client to move from the individual counselling relationship to the larger gay and lesbian community experience.



II. GROUP FACILITATION

Role of the Group Facilitators

Although all groups rely upon facilitators to set the tone for the work to be undertaken, facilitators of the “Making Connections” groups have a key role because they share the same sexual orientation as the client population. The facilitators need to have resolved their own issues with “coming out” and have achieved a comfort level with their own sexuality in order to be able to recognize subtle forms of internalized sexual shame which will be present during the life of the group. The three most important roles the facilitators need to be prepared for are *Modeling*, *Self-disclosure* and *Containment/Safety*.

The facilitators need to have resolved their own issues with “coming out” and have achieved a comfort level with their own sexuality

- 1 **Modeling** is a powerful tool for groups dealing with social isolation and communication skills. The facilitator, regardless of his or her style, will model not only communication skills but also comfort with discussing sexuality issues that are shame-based.
- 2 **Self-disclosure** by facilitators, when brief and purposeful, can work to build trust. More specifically, clients will trust that facilitators know isolation and internalized shame in a personal way. It can help a client to know that internalized homophobia is not a personal failing but rather a by-product of our unique experiences of oppression as a group in a society that is fragmented in its acceptance of our visible existence.
- 3 **Containment** and safety is provided by the facilitators to ensure group members can expose personal vulnerabilities in addressing their personal concerns, especially when dealing with conflict or emotionally stirring subject matters such as a client’s disclosure of sexual abuse or assault. Other group members will look to the facilitators to create containment and safety not only for the members involved in the conflict/self-disclosure but also for those members who may be traumatized by what they see and hear.



Group Facilitator's Style

Group facilitators brought unique theoretical preferences and style to bear in how those first groups were run. One's personal professional style may emphasize cognitive processes, stress experiencing and expressing feelings, or focus on action-oriented methods. On the other hand one's approach may combine and integrate cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions.

Whatever one's preferences, the intentions and goals of these groups can be adapted to suit your particular style of leadership. However, it is key to be able to incorporate an intrapersonal and interpersonal orientation focus (Corey, 1990). An intrapersonal orientation focuses on conflicts and dynamics within the individual while an interpersonal orientation focuses on the relationships between group members.

The longer the group runs, the more opportunities there will be to effectively focus on interpersonal dynamics. These can be generalized to how the group member relates to others in her/his life outside the group. Being able to address both interpersonal and intrapersonal orientations will depend upon the preferences of the facilitators and weight placed on group dynamics over individual conflicts. It is important to remember that to a certain degree each group possesses a life of its own to the extent that the skills, needs and interaction of each new group of individuals will blend to determine how the intentions, goals and themes will be addressed.

Co-facilitation

It can be financially difficult for agencies to cover the costs of providing two facilitators per group. The benefits of having two facilitators are enormous, however, for both the group and the facilitators. For instance:

- ➔ A second facilitator serves to keep tabs on the dynamics of the group and to share the responsibility of presenting psycho-educational material as well as facilitating group process
- ➔ Having two facilitators provides the opportunity for critical feedback and future planning at the end of each session
- ➔ Many of the stories shared in these groups will be poignant and emotionally powerful. The facilitators can offer each other pertinent debriefing as well as support



It is also essential that the co-leaders be given time to get to know one another prior to the beginning of the intake process, if they have not worked together before. It would be better to have a single well-trained and experienced group leader than co-leaders who do not work well as a partnership.

Sexual Orientation of Group Facilitators



The sexual orientation of the group facilitator can be an issue in a variety of ways. We believe it is essential that facilitators in the “Making Connections” are members of the gay and lesbian communities.

The presence of a gay or lesbian therapist can be a positive role model. The facilitator’s degree of comfort with self-disclosure about her or his challenges with “coming out” and managing life tasks in a heterosexist world can offer the experience of normalizing, self-acceptance, learning, and camaraderie.

A number of studies have been conducted identifying client preferences for the sexual orientation of counsellors (Garnets et al, 1991; Klein, 1991; Trippet, 1994; McDermott & Stadler, 1988; Poverny, 1999; Liddle, 1999). These studies have found that a majority of gay and lesbian clients prefer a counsellor of the same sexual orientation. Many studies have also documented case examples of clients’ negative experiences with heterosexual counsellors (Bieschke & Matthews, 1996; Ryan et al, 1999). Out of this arises a most salient question:

Who is best qualified to offer counselling to gay and lesbian clients? This question has been posed and debated in many studies and articles over the last twenty years. General consensus has been that our history and ongoing experience of oppression and minority status creates a need for trained service providers from the identified gay and lesbian communities.

Ultimately, a skilled counsellor with experience and knowledge of gay and lesbian communities and an understanding of the politics of oppression and its impact on the individual, couple, family and community should, regardless of orientation, be prepared to offer therapeutic support to gays and lesbians. However, anecdotal and research findings underline the problem of inconsistency in how gays and lesbians are treated in the therapeutic encounter by heterosexual counsellors (Schoenberg et al, 1985; Liddle, 1999; Klein, 1991).



This is not to say that all heterosexual counsellors are unskilled to provide appropriate support to gays and lesbians. Many examples exist of positive experiences for gays and lesbians with experienced heterosexual counsellors. But for the purposes of the Making Connections group, it is essential the facilitators be “out” gay men and lesbians.

Internship/Training Potential

Training programs are few and far between that offer gay and lesbian counsellors and counselling students the opportunity to enhance their skills for working in our communities. Fewer still are designed to challenge internalized sexual shame and heterosexism in a non-threatening and growth-oriented manner.

These groups can be a very useful training experience for gay and lesbian counsellors/students wanting to increase their experience. Having a counsellor/student sit-in, as an observer, would provide an opportunity for them to develop culture-specific group work skills and to deepen their understanding of the issues facing socially isolated gays and lesbians.



III. GROUP DESIGN

Group Objectives

The following is a list of overall objectives for the “Making Connections” groups. Not all of these objectives will be realized during the life of each group. Therefore, it is important to be realistic in choosing the objectives you will highlight in each given group.

- ➔ *Create* safety to explore sexual issues in relationships
- ➔ *Offer* the opportunity to meet others experiencing similar difficulties with identity and community membership
- ➔ *Engage* in structured activities that promote self-awareness
- ➔ *Normalize* the individual difficulties experienced by clients in isolation (reduce self-blame)
- ➔ *Develop* supportive alliances with other gay men or lesbians participating in the group experience
- ➔ *Educate* about the impact of internalized shame on individual initiative and relationships
- ➔ *Recognize* the need for connection, alliances, and pride for a healthy self-concept
- ➔ *Identify* facets that comprise healthy gay and lesbian love relationships within the context of an oppressive social environment
- ➔ *Understand* differences between friendship and sexual/love relationships in the unique context of gay and lesbian society
- ➔ *Increase* risk-taking in the social context i.e. being seen and known as gay or lesbian
- ➔ *Take* the opportunity to learn how others have managed being “out” in the world



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- ➔ *Practice* communication skills. How to share thoughts and feelings in ways that promote connections. To learn that sexual identity is not a life-style choice but a felt sense and experience that is not reflected in healthy ways in the larger social environment
 - ➔ *Learn* that identity is a life long experience even when we have had no external cues during childhood/adolescence that our inner experience is a reflection of a normal, healthy orientation ... that in fact we learn it is unhealthy or marginally tolerable
 - ➔ *Recognize* how heterosexual family dynamics contribute to distortions in gay and lesbian identity formation
 - ➔ *Share* the experience of being shamed for not only our sexual experience but also for our preferences: activities that have been historically and continue to be expressed as belonging to one gender i.e. girls wanting to develop mechanical abilities and boys wanting to develop creative skills

Group Membership

This group is intended for individuals and not couples. Even though many people may come to the group precisely because they are having difficulties in their relationship, having one or two couples in the group will affect the group dynamics considerably. Individuals also may feel unable to raise feelings and concerns they have about their relationship if their partner is present.

Having said that, however, this group could be adapted for couples. In a society where heterosexual couples are the norm, providing a supportive environment for gay and lesbian couples to work in a group with other same-sex couples would be highly beneficial.

To prevent sub-grouping which could have a difficult impact on the overall group dynamics, it is not a good idea to have friends in the same group.

Size of Group

The group size could vary anywhere from five to twelve members, with an outside maximum of ten to twelve members.



The advantage of offering a theme-based psycho-educational group instead of an open-ended psychotherapy group is that it allows for a larger number of participants. This model provides everyone the opportunity to work on their issues concurrently rather than working with one person at a time. The drawback to a larger group is that it diminishes opportunities for every member to have air time.

Also in a large group, trust can be slower to develop. For some members a larger group is a more intimidating place to begin to share feelings and personal experiences. There are also many more people to create connections with which could slow the process of group-building.

The importance of creating plenty of opportunity for individuals to be heard is especially important in terms of the group purpose: making connections with others. We found the desire to be heard, to have the chance to share their stories, was particularly evident due to the experience of isolation these clients felt.

Length of Group

A total of eight groups were offered over two years, four for lesbians, four for gay men. In the pilot we ran the first group for eight weeks and ten to twelve sessions for subsequent groups. We would recommend running the group for at least ten to twelve sessions. If you are choosing to run the group with ten to twelve clients having twelve to sixteen sessions would be very effective. Regardless of the number you choose, members often feel the groups are not long enough.

Themes

- ➔ *Internalized Homophobia* – view of ourselves as gay men, coming out, the straight to gay transition, e.g., address heterosexism, homophobia
- ➔ *Coming Out* – coming out to self, to others, impact on making connections, e.g., family, workplace, friends, community
- ➔ *Gay Myths* – roles, the gay community, pigeon-holing based on body size, the community as only a sexual place
- ➔ *Body Image* – self-confidence, how to feel attractive and sexy, what happens if you're not buff



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- ➔ *Relationship with Yourself* – self-awareness, self-acceptance
 - ➔ *Gay Friendships* – how do we create and maintain friendships with other gay men
 - ➔ *Dating* – how to talk to people, how to pace relationships, fear of rejection
 - ➔ *Sex* – fear of HIV, reliance on anonymous connections, sex in relationships: how to establish it, how to maintain it
 - ➔ *Unfinished Business* – anything left the members want/need to address
 - ➔ *Self-esteem*
 - ➔ *Building Healthy Relationships*
 - ➔ *Boundaries in Relationships*
 - ➔ *Creating Community*
 - ➔ *History/Her Story of Relationships*
 - ➔ *Building Resources*
 - ➔ *Communication Tools*
 - ➔ *Grief and Loss*
 - ➔ *Obstacles to Connecting with Others*
 - ➔ *Abuse in Relationships*



IV. GROUP EXERCISES

The following is a compilation of activities and exercises that were used by the group facilitators. They cover a range of sociometric, guided imagery, expressive arts, written exercises and homework activities adapted from several sources for use in these particular groups.

Although some of the exercises were adapted from the skill set of our current group facilitators, in particular LeeAndra Miller, Nelson Parker and Mary Dyson, we would also like to thank Derek Scott of the AIDS Bereavement Project and Susan Aaron for permission to use and adapt some of their work.

Feelings, Experiences And Themes: Making Connections

(Exercises adapted for use, with permission, from Derek Scott)

Ice Breaker

Sociometry exercise to warm up to self-disclosure and to facilitate members getting to know each other.

- ➔ Define clearly “coming-out” i.e. when came-out to self, when they knew they were attracted to same-sex
- ➔ Create a time-line on the floor of the room defining ages for “coming-out” i.e. as a small child (born knowing), during school-age years, adolescence, young adulthood, older adult (recently)
- ➔ Ask participants to place themselves in the time frame that best describes when they “came-out”
- ➔ Beginning with those who have been “out” the longest, ask each person to share their experiences, struggles, affirmations from this place
- ➔ After each person has shared, have the group return to their seats and share what it was like to speak/listen. Ask if anyone has any worries or concerns about anything they said. Ask if anyone has a question or concern they need to direct at another group member
- ➔ Continue the discussion until the anxiety level in the group has dropped and each has had an opportunity to share and reflect



“Depicting Self”

Drawing exercise to increase understanding/insight into how one relates to others and to increase group interactions in giving and receiving feedback, self-disclosure and risk-taking.

- ➔ Give each person flip-chart paper and coloured markers, pastels, pencils
- ➔ Explain that this is not an art exercise but rather a simple way of gaining new insights into how we feel about ourselves in relation to the issue of the group
- ➔ Ask people to “depict” themselves in relation to the topic, in this case relationships or connections with others
- ➔ Have group members return to the circle with their depictions. Taking turns, ask each person to hold up their depiction and give a brief explanation of what they have created. After each has spoken, invite questions, reflections, and impressions from the rest of the group about what they see. Ask the drawer to listen only, until everyone has spoken. Ask the drawer to respond to what was shared about their picture. Continue until everyone has shared their drawing, received feedback and responded to the feedback. Note how the comments on each person’s depiction are to be about the picture, not the drawer.

Guided Memory

This exercise can assist participants in recognizing parts of self that have been buried because of internalized shame (homophobia) and heterosexism. It can allow members to honour their early knowing and encourage the group to reflect on how being silenced about their feelings and the invisibility of gay/lesbian roles affected their early identity formation and has contributed to relationship issues in the present. Essentially, the key point is: we learn at an early age that our desires are unacceptable and that gets translated into “I’m not acceptable” and/or “I’m different” .

- ➔ Begin by inviting participants to get comfortable and gently lead them through a relaxation exercise. Tell them the time is now and invite them to let any stray thoughts simply happen, then to notice them and let them go.



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- ➔ Invite each participant to go back in time to her or his first memory of feeling something different for the same-sex (with male participants you can be more direct in identifying sexual attraction but don't exclude sexual feelings in questions to the women.)
 - ➔ Ask them to remember how they felt and thought, what they did with this experience, any action they took, or didn't take, and what happened next.
 - ➔ Invite members to turn their attention to the group. Ask them to take turns reflecting on what they learned about their sexual self and their general feelings about themselves from doing this exercise.

Gay Girl/Boy Memories

This exercise can assist participants in re-claiming their lesbigay identity over time. Within the group they can make these early memories public and receive affirmation from others of their experience of themselves as queer (which they likely kept secret or were not consciously aware of at the time.)

- ➔ Ask individuals to reflect on their growing years and share with the group if there were experiences they had, actions they took as children, for which they did not receive support and, which they would now identify as lesbian/gay. Use your own experience as an example, if the group is having difficulty getting started.

Some Additional Exercises For Gay Men's Groups

(Some can be adapted for lesbian groups, such as *Dating* and the second Scenario)

Body Image

Gay men may have issues to deal with regarding weight, body type, pressure to be muscular/hairless/gym-bunny types, eating disordered, etc. Clients may also have issues surrounding their stereotyped beliefs about what gay men look like, or the sexualized images often presented as representative of gay men. Clients may also have HIV-related issues.



Clients are asked to look through copies of the local gay media, in our case, *Xtra!* and *Fab*. The men are asked to select an image saying something about themselves which they feel good about, and another image portraying something which they would like to see different. They are given five to seven minutes during which to peruse the magazines and then a discussion is held where the men present their choices and share their feelings with the group.

Dating

Gay men in the group often present a lack of experience or comfort in dating. Many state they don't know how to begin conversations, while others say they don't know how to determine whether a person wants to be friends or is pursuing them romantically/sexually. Group members often have few role models showing ways to deal intimately with other men. This exercise should be done with humour and lightness; it can be quite illustrative of the member's strengths and struggles.

Three scenarios are created to role play situations which could occur in the gay community. Members are invited and/or encouraged to volunteer for these role plays. Each role play lasts about five minutes. The leaders determine when to stop, and the actors are first asked to debrief how they felt in their roles. The group is then invited to give feedback, emphasizing support to other members.

Scenario I

You are at Starbucks on a crowded Saturday afternoon. There is only one seat available, at a table where an interesting guy is sitting. He smiles and indicates you can share his table.

Scenario II

You are on a date with a man you really like. You've had a nice evening, dinner and a movie, and when you're walking him home you're hoping he invites you in to continue the evening.



Closure Exercise

(adapted with permission: Susan Aaron, Psychodramatic Bodywork)

This is an exercise we have used during the last session. It is designed to offer an experience of closure which can be a model for participants when they face closure in other areas of their life. We introduce this exercise in the week before the last session so people have time to prepare their responses before coming to group. We do this for two reasons. First, because it is a long process and completion is crucial in order for healthy closure to occur. We cannot provide enough time for members to prepare their responses during group time. Second and more significantly, it is important to prepare group members for closure well in advance of the ending. Many clients have experienced abrupt and painful endings in relationships where effective closure was not achieved. This can become emotional baggage which clients carry into their next relationship. Asking them to work on this exercise between the second-to-last and last group will provide an opportunity for group members to deal with the feelings of saying goodbye.

Ask the group members to write down the following questions and answer them at home the week before the final session:

Gains and Achievements

What have I gained or achieved as a result of attending this group?

Appreciations

What have I appreciated in myself, as a group member, and what have I appreciated in other group members? Have them write on separate pieces of paper things they appreciate about each group member (i.e. ways they have seen others change during the course of the group, or qualities they have admired.)

Unfinished Business

Is there anything which occurred in group troubling me which I have not addressed in group? Anything I wished I had said but didn't?



Regrets

Do I have any regrets about my participation in this group? For example, things I wish I did in group but did not do?

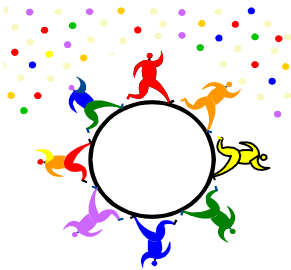
Ghosts Of Closures Past

We have all had many goodbyes in our past. Are any of these previous closures present for me now?

Moving On: What's Next

What is the next step I can take from this group?

Finally, have the group intentionally look at each other group member with the awareness that this will be the last time they will see each other in this configuration. Ask them to say the word "goodbye" to the entire group. Ask them to turn and step away from the group as a deliberate action of moving on from the group.



Expressive Art Therapy Exercises



Picture Collection

Previous to beginning the group, collect a range of interesting images, from magazines and other sources, portraying a variety of people, landscapes, and activities. Make sure there are several images reflecting the diversity of the gay and lesbian community. Mount these images on construction paper in order to stabilize them so they can be used again. Spread the fifty-plus images around the room and have group members walk about looking at the pictures. Ask them to choose two pictures which reflect their answers to the following questions.

- 1 Choose a picture which speaks to you about what brought you to this particular group.
- 2 Choose a second picture which speaks to you about what you hope to get out of this group. What are your goals or what do you hope will be different by the time you leave this group?

It's important to remind clients that as they choose the pictures they do not have to understand why it is they are drawn to them. In fact, encourage them to allow the picture to choose them. Ask group members to individually write about each picture. Encourage them to ask each picture what it has to say in terms of answering the questions, and not to censor any answer which comes to them. At this point, have the group share by showing their two pictures and talking about its relationship with the questions. At the completion of each participant's sharing, invite group feedback/questions.

Homophobia Drawing

The object of this exercise is to explore messages we hold about what it means to be lesbian/gay. In this exercise clients build two characters which reflect their "self". The first character is a character who is proud and delighted to be a lesbian/gay man. The second is a reflection of the homophobic self, who possibly carries shame/self hate about being a lesbian/gay man. To build these characters, draw them on a large piece of paper and write message "bubbles" that hold key phrases about what they think/feel. Have group members give each character a name. It's important to give options about how they draw their characters. For instance, not only could they draw a human form, but they could also draw abstract images, symbols, or things such as animals, etc.



After the drawing is finished, ask them to do a piece of writing similar to a play where they have these two characters dialogue with each other. Ask them to come back to the group and share. Encourage group feedback after each participant shares his/her experience.

Self Esteem Map

The object of this exercise is to identify relationships between self-esteem, boundaries, and the context in which they live their lives. On a large sheet of paper ask group members to draw a circle in the center of page. In this circle ask them to draw a representation of their self-esteem. Ask them to draw images, symbols, and words about how they feel and think about themselves. On the outside of the circle, ask them to draw representations of all the areas/people in their life which influences their self-esteem, i.e. family members, work, media, lovers etc. These can be both supportive and unsupportive influences. The next part of the drawing is to pay attention to the circle boundary surrounding the image of self-esteem. Ask them to draw the appropriate boundary which they feel they have between various people/ influences on the outside. For example, if their family members are very heterosexist, and their views impact the client directly, the client might draw a very thin line or even a broken line on that part of the circle. After they are done with their drawing, ask them to share their map with the group. Assist clients in identifying which areas, on their maps, they would like to change and which areas they would like to strengthen.

The sculptor, with permission, moves the two group members into a frozen stance representing the way they relate to each other.

Relationship Body-Sculpting

The object of this exercise is for clients to have the opportunity to examine a particular relationship they are either currently in or have previously been in, and to identify how they would like it to change. Have a client volunteer to be the sculptor. Have the sculptor describe the specific relationship they want to explore. Encourage them to share how they see some of the characteristics of the person with whom they are in relationship. Ask them to pick someone from the group who will take on the role of themselves and someone from the group who will take on the role of the other person in the relationship. The sculptor, with permission, moves the two group members into a frozen stance representing the way they relate to each other. The sculptor can start with the group member playing them and ask that person to assume a particular posture showing how they feel in relationship to the other. Then the other is sculpted in relationship to the character playing their self. They continue to move the frozen characters around until the sculptor feels she/he has visually



captured that relationship. At this point, ask the sculptor whether there is any one sentence each character could speak which would go with the sculpture. Have the characters share this statement several times. Have each character then share the body sensations/feelings they are experiencing in this frozen position. Ask the sculptor to step into each character, one at a time, and describe how it feels. Ask the sculptor to rearrange how they would like the relationship to look. Pay particular attention to the movements it would take to shift from one position to another. Discuss out loud what the group thinks might need to happen in order to make the movement from one position into another. Finish by debriefing and opening it up to a group discussion including issues which got raised for each of the members.

Relationship Road Maps

Using the metaphor of the road, they can draw their history of relating to others.

The object of this exercise is to have clients explore and share their history in relationship with each other. On a very large square sheet of paper which group members can sit around, draw a small circle in the very center. In the middle of this circle, write the name of this group. Instruct group members to draw a "road map" leading to the circle which represents their road of relationships "on a time line". At the outside edge, they can start with childhood; when they reach the center circle this brings them to the present. Using the metaphor of the road, they can draw their history of relating to others. Encourage them to use many colours, road signs, and other symbols to indicate their experiences. Once these roads are finished, have them share their life journey to date with the group. After everyone has shared, spend time as a group working on the center circle. Have them each draw things symbolizing how they would like to be or relate in this group.

Relationship Pictures/Poetry

Give clients ample art supplies to work with. Choosing their own media have them paint/draw/collage one particular relationship that they are in or were previously in. Encourage them to not have a fixed outcome in mind but to allow the art to go the direction it chooses. After they are finished with their artwork, give out a pile of small pieces of paper to each client. Have them look over each piece of art and write down a word /or short sentence that comes to mind when viewing the painting. Emphasize that these are not words or sentences that comment on the painting i.e. "This river is so beautiful", but rather words inspired by the painting i.e. "Strong waves crashing". Once



everyone has visited each painting, the client returns to her/his own painting and reads the words. The task is then to use some/all of the words, and supplement these with other words to create a poem. Each group member then shares the poem and talks about its connection to the relationship they are/were in.

Re-Writing Messages

This exercise is designed to bring out the messages we have about ourselves and to start the process of giving ourselves new messages. In pairs, have clients pick the role of the speaker and the writer. The writer asks the speaker the question “who are you?” over and over again. The speaker answers these questions with a new answer each time. The writer’s job is to record the answers on a piece of paper. The idea is to ask the question immediately after the speaker has given the answer, and to encourage the speaker to answer without censoring their thoughts. This goes on for approximately five minutes. The writer then reads the responses and the speaker shares her/his feelings about the exercise. Ask them to particularly identify where they were surprised. They then change roles and the exercise is repeated. Individually, each participant takes time to look at their list and identify the message they would like to change. They then write up a message which differs from the one that they wanted to change. Back in pairs, they read the old message and have their partner answer it with the new message. They then switch messages: the partner reads the old message while the client answers it with the new message. They should read these messages several times. The whole group gathers for a discussion of the process.

Pairs Clay Sculpting

The goal of this process is to learn more about how we relate to others. Have the group choose a partner with whom to work. Each pair is given one lump of clay. Their only instruction is to work in silence but together build one clay sculpture. Ask them to notice how they are acting and feeling throughout the art making. Give them fifteen minutes to work. Afterwards, instruct them to write in their journal about what they noticed about how they interacted with their partner during the sculpting. Did one person lead more than another? Was it difficult to start something new? How did they deal with space issues? Did they re-sculpt something the other had already sculpted? How did it feel? Next, have them share, in pairs, what they noticed about themselves. Ask them to take the conversation further and see if connections can be drawn as to how they relate with others in their lives. Take the group on a tour of these clay sculptures, then return to a whole group discussion.



Baggies Story Telling

This exercise can be used in a variety of ways. It can be tailored to meet the theme that you are working with. For each group member, have one plastic zip-lock baggie filled with ten small items i.e. paper clip, Band-Aid, dime, stone, ring, fortune, twist-tie, toy etc. Ask participants to fully explore their bag and see if any story, either real or imagined, comes to mind when they examine these items. One single item, or several, could remind them of a story. If you want it to be theme-related such as a “coming-out” experience, ask them to find items reminding them of a “coming-out” story. After having had time to receive and explore their story, have them share it with the whole group.

Weekly Assignments

In the groups for gay men, each week the men were given an assignment that facilitated their integration into the gay community. Assignments began with directions to find a place in the gay community where they felt comfortable, and to observe their thoughts and feelings, and be able to report back to the group their experience. Each week the men debriefed their assignments during the check-in, and feedback was provided as to their success or where they may need to challenge themselves. Assignments become progressively more difficult each week, asking the men to find places that are uncomfortable, where they feel sexually attractive, and moving towards challenging them to actually make connections which they can report back to the group. These assignments were typically linked to the themes of the evening’s discussion.

Initially, we had the men complete assignments alone, however, it appeared that 1) the men were likely to have contact outside the group anyway; and 2) some members needed the assistance of the connections they had established in the group in order to venture into the gay community. The group members were typically assigned partners/team members to accompany by the facilitators, factoring in age, compatibility of client’s issues, and likelihood of success. Occasionally, they were allowed to group themselves and left with the responsibility to co-ordinate their ventures.

Note: Assignments sometimes need to be tailored to suit individual needs, i.e. not sending clients with alcohol problems to bars. Also, clients need to be challenged to identify new ways of connecting if their traditional ones have become dysfunctional, i.e. only connecting with other gay men for sex.

Generally, the clients liked the assignments because they were so “hands-on”, but did identify that they were difficult to do.



V. GROUP PREPARATION

Advertising-Promotion-Recruitment

It is important to begin advertising well before group is to start in order to allow ample time for screening.

Focus on the placement of ads in the local queer press. It is also a good idea to fax and e-mail to a broad range of social and health services. Although more expensive, if budget allows advertise in a popular mainstream paper to notify people who are isolated from the community and do not have access to queer press. Networking with other agencies known to serve gay men and lesbians is another important way of recruiting members for these groups.

Materials and Supplies

Hold group sessions in a private room where no interruptions will occur. Being aware of the other clients who might be using your agency at the same time is an important consideration. For instance, in the agency this project was conducted, there was an anger management group being facilitated for men charged with domestic assault running simultaneously. For safety issues, and to minimize the opportunity for hetero-sexist comments to be made, we chose to offer the group at a location in the centre where they would be unlikely to encounter each other.

The room should also be large enough to conduct several of the exercises listed in this manual. The following is a list of supplies we had available for the exercises and for the comfort of clients:

- ✓ Kleenex
- ✓ water and cups
- ✓ flip chart and flip chart paper
- ✓ large markers
- ✓ pens, pencils, and journaling paper
- ✓ masking tape
- ✓ large pads of manila art paper



-
- ✓ a few boxes of oil pastels in assorted colors
 - ✓ collage materials i.e., old queer magazines, tissue paper, assorted paper
 - ✓ scissors and glue

Screening

- ➔ Need to have a process in place for screening first-contact phone calls
- ➔ Clients will want to speak to someone about the group before booking an interview; make sure reception or intake worker is prepared to answer general questions about the group and is comfortable and appropriate with gays and lesbians
- ➔ Screen-out those who may be in crisis and make referrals for support
- ➔ If a client is actively suicidal she/he is not appropriate for the group and referral will be necessary
- ➔ If addictions are an issue participation is still okay if they have therapeutic support.

Intake Interview

The purpose of an intake interview is to meet with the client beforehand to assess the appropriateness of the group from both the client's and the therapist's perspective. It provides the therapist an opportunity to learn more about the potential issues a client may bring to group, an idea of where they are in their process, a sense of the whole group make-up prior to the start of the group. The interview also provides an opportunity for the client to ask questions about what the group will be like and to make a connection with the facilitator. The intake interviews we conducted are listed in the appendix of this manual. Again, you may wish to tailor it to your specific needs.

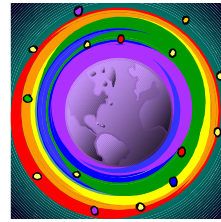


Evaluations

We found evaluations to be very useful in terms of making changes necessary for improving the group. The evaluations we used are listed in the appendix of this manual. It is imperative that you offer adequate time in the group to have participants complete evaluations. It is easy to forego allowing the required time to complete evaluations in favour of other agendas, however in the long run it will be a loss to the program's development. In our evaluation we used the system of rating areas of interest with both a number rating and space for comments. We found if there was little time to complete the evaluations, clients would only circle the numbers and not provide a comment indicating why they chose this number. As we tabulated evaluations there were points where it left the facilitators guessing as to why they chose the numbers they did. we used different evaluations for the men's and women's group. The themes of these groups were generated from each group individually; therefore each group had different sessions to evaluate. You will also need to adjust the evaluation form to reflect choices your group made regarding themes and exercises.



VI. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



Ethno-racial and Cultural Issues

Gay and lesbian communities comprise a diversity of subgroups similar to heterosexual communities. Some of the more obvious sub-groupings include ethno-racial and cultural variations.

Ethno-racial/cultural sub-groups in the gay and lesbian communities experience isolation to a greater degree than in heterosexual communities. Not only do they experience systemic homophobia, racism, and cultural invisibility but depending upon their cultural/racial affiliation they may also experience alienation from their communities of origin.

Similar to heterosexual communities, white gays and lesbians control most of the scarce economic resources in the visible gay and lesbian communities. This reality underscores the need to ensure that particular attention is paid to including outreach to diverse ethno-racial gays and lesbians. There are a number of ways this can be accomplished:

- ➔ Proposing joint initiatives with gays and lesbians from varying ethno-racial/cultural groups known in the community
- ➔ Making resources available so sub-groups can adapt the “Making Connections” group for their own use
- ➔ Including gay and lesbian facilitators from those diverse communities

These are not the only strategies that can or should be employed but they can be first steps in making these groups more accessible.

Differing Abilities

Gay and lesbian communities comprise an array of individuals who also experience isolation due to having ‘differing abilities’. Participation in community activities that support connection and membership can be hampered when groups do not attend to access issues. Wheelchair accessibility, including entrance to the building, washroom facilities and space



in the group room, is one issue which will need to be addressed before inviting the participation of people in wheelchairs.

Access goes beyond attending to the physical space. Groups must always support the isolate. Within the life of the group individuals with differing abilities can become further isolated because the group does not fully accommodate their need for inclusion. It is common practice for groups to follow the rule of the majority. In order to be inclusive shift must take place away from the majority to an emphasis on the individual who is isolated.

Key learning for us was that some individuals in our communities want to be able to participate in a group that has mixed membership and others request culturally/ linguistically/disability-specific programs. In an ideal economy both forms of groups would exist. With creativity and joint initiatives it can be possible.



VII. PROCESS ISSUES

Re-framing

- ➔ Facilitators must be able to identify when a group member exhibits internalized homophobia toward self (e.g., "I hate who I am" in reference to sexual orientation) and tease out how negative social messages about homosexuality contribute to poor self esteem
- ➔ Similarly facilitators need to identify when a group member is projecting internalized shame / homophobia onto the community (e.g., "I'm not like them"), which contributes to overall negative social messages about lesbians and gay men and ultimately to oneself as a lesbian or gay person
- ➔ Group dynamic and facilitators can collude with internalized homophobia since heterosexist and homophobic attitudes are so prevalent throughout our lives and we all experience internalized homophobia to some degree
- ➔ The visible gay/lesbian community is more than what transpires on Church Street but this area is the heart of what we and the heterosexual community identifies as our community

"Coming Out of Isolation"

- ➔ Need to have time set aside for members to tell their "coming out" stories. Useful to have a psycho-ed component to discuss what internalized shame/homophobia and heterosexism is and its impact on self-esteem and relationships
- ➔ Include a discussion of life stages with "coming out". Those who "come out" later in life may experience more feelings of regret or lost time and opportunities. There can be greater struggles dealing with homophobia because of more years in "hiding"/shame
- ➔ Positive aspects of "coming out" later in life should also be addressed i.e. more maturity, more free time from care of children, able to now focus on self



Confidentiality

- ➔ It's a small community and there is a high likelihood members may know or have some experience with each other prior to joining group
- ➔ Members need to decide if they wish to acknowledge each other in the community
- ➔ Members may recognize people identified in stories about relationships
- ➔ Members will be concerned about their story being told
- ➔ Prepare members for these issues by raising them at the start of group
- ➔ Need agreement that members will not share stories outside group but must warn members they should be prepared to share only what they are comfortable with others knowing
- ➔ Facilitators must also address their own need for privacy outside their role as group facilitators

Relationships Outside of Group

- ➔ Propose a guideline suggesting members not become involved with each other romantically or sexually during the life of the group. It can happen, however, and will impact on the group process
- ➔ May want to encourage friendship-based connections or focus on accomplishing group/individual goals
- ➔ Issues will arise in these relationships and members should be encouraged to bring them to group for processing and learning



Homework

- ➔ Homework can be used to concretize individual goals
- ➔ High anxiety members may need to work (non-sexually) with another group member to accomplish homework, i.e. making a visit to Church Street and practicing starting a conversation with someone in a gay environment

Challenging Myths and Stereotypes

- ➔ Need to consistently insert positive messages about gay and lesbian community throughout life of group in order to counter negative myths and stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream culture and media
- ➔ Educate members on the variety of sub-groups and cultures comprising “the community”. We are more than Church Street but Church Street provides an important location for community to develop and be visible. There are problems in every community and this is normal. Everyone must find a niche

Pacing

- ➔ Try not to pack in too much content. Members will need lots of time to discuss all aspects of themes
- ➔ Better to deal with a few key themes well and consider holding a follow up or second stage dealing with new issues
- ➔ Interpersonal issues will arise and will need time to be processed. Too great a focus on an agenda will result in missed opportunities to learn from issues arising from group member’s interactions with each other




Location, Location, Location

- 🏠 Holding the group near the gay and lesbian village encourages pre and post group visits to the neighborhood
- 🏠 Choosing a room that is private, secure, and won't be interrupted will insure clients feel safer. It also enables clients to feel more comfortable with sharing painful feelings and experiences, which will in turn enhance group intimacy and cohesion
- 🏠 It is important to keep in mind issues of physical safety for clients in accessing the location. Being close to public transportation is ideal
- 🏠 Providing a wheel-chair accessible space is crucial to providing service to the whole community


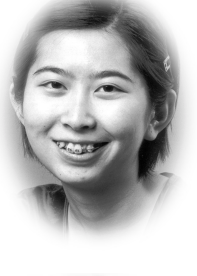



VIII. Evaluation

Summary of Women's Groups



In total 26 women participated in the four groups that we offered. Each was given an evaluation form to fill out on the last night of the group. The evaluation consisted of a series of questions about their experience of the group. Answers given were to be rated on the following scale: 1 (not at all satisfied), 2 (somewhat satisfied), 3 (satisfied), 4 (very satisfied) or 5 (excellent) – see Appendix II. Each question provided space for additional comments. Attrition in the final group resulted in fewer evaluations completed overall. The following is a list of data we compiled from the four groups combined.

- 
- ➔ On all questions combined, 99% of group members rated their responses as satisfied to excellent.
- 
- ➔ When asked how satisfied they were of their overall group experience, 100% of the group members responded that they were satisfied and 79% were very satisfied or rated it excellent.
 - ➔ In response to how well they felt supported by the group, 100% of the group members felt satisfied and 87% were very satisfied or answered excellent.
 - ➔ With only one exception all group members rated as very satisfied, or answered excellent, to being asked how safe they felt in the group.
- 
- ➔ 83% of group members felt they were very satisfied or found the experience excellent in having enough opportunity to speak.
 - ➔ With only one exception all of the group members indicated they were very satisfied or found the experience excellent when asked if they felt listened to when they spoke.
 - ➔ With only one exception all group members were satisfied with the topics covered.
- ➔ In overall ratings of the exercises that were utilized during the groups, 98% of the group members responded with a rating of 3 (satisfied) and 86% rated the exercises as 4 (highly satisfied) or 5 (excellent).



-
- ➔ When asked how well the group met their expectations, only one of the 26 group members indicated less than a satisfied response, whereas two thirds of the group members were very satisfied or found the group excellent.

The following is a brief summary of the comments group participants included on their evaluations:

In terms of the group meeting client's expectations, clients expressed a satisfaction in being able to share emotions and explore their issues. Several group members spoke of the importance they felt in learning how to express their vulnerable feelings effectively and receive feedback from their peers.

In response to the questions of feeling supported and safe in the group, members expressed a strong positive response. A few talked about the moments they felt highly vulnerable and how important it was that the facilitators maintained safety due to these feelings.

When asked if they felt they had enough opportunity to speak the first group indicated that they would have liked more time to speak. Subsequent groups shared that they were highly satisfied with the time they had to speak expressing "there was more than enough". The differences between the groups that could have attributed to this feedback were that the first group had more members and ran two weeks less than subsequent groups. With reference to feeling heard by other group members and facilitators, many women identified that the constant feedback they received as part of group process indicated to them that they felt understood by other group members. This reinforced the importance of having group members respond to each participant after sharing vulnerable feelings.

When clients were asked if they were satisfied with the topics covered, the feedback we received in the first group indicated the direction in which we could most improve. During the pilot group, the process involved working with issues each client indicated a desire to explore, rather than following weekly themes. Each individual group member was given a session to explore the issue she chose. At the end they expressed their wish to have covered more topics in depth. We changed the format for subsequent groups so that sessions were based on themes generated from the group in the first two sessions. Response from group members was more favourable in taking this approach in the subsequent groups.

Many women identified that the constant feedback they received as part of group process indicated to them that they felt understood by other group members.



The exercises that we utilized during the 10 weeks were each individually evaluated. Overall people were very satisfied and some exercises were rated excellent. We found that using exercises to be a very effect tool for exploring both feelings and content.

Overall we found that the groups were well received. All participants indicated satisfaction with the group experience on their evaluations. One client responded, "Getting feedback and encouragement from the other group members and facilitators was vital to my learning and healing process...it was absolutely a positive experience."



Summary of Men's Groups

Of the thirty-four men registered, four left prior to group completion. Thirty men completed evaluations on the last nights of their group. Each question consisted of rating the group based on a scale from 1 (not at all satisfied) 0, 2 (somewhat satisfied) 3 (satisfied), 4 (very satisfied) to 5 (excellent).

The evaluation format was modified following the first group, in order to gather the most accurate data regarding the group members' level of satisfaction with their experience, as well as how effective they felt the group was in helping them become more connected with other gay men.

- ➔ When asked how satisfied they were with the overall group experience, 100% of the members were satisfied, with 80% rating their experience as very satisfying or excellent
- ➔ When asked if they were able to identify and address the barriers they experience, 95% felt the group helped them to a level that was very satisfactory or excellent
- ➔ When asked if they felt more confident in attempting to connect with other gay men, 86% felt the group had helped to a level they rated very satisfactory or excellent
- ➔ In response to how well they felt supported by the group, 95% of the members felt satisfied, with the majority, 71%, rating it at level of very satisfactory or excellent
- ➔ When asked if they felt connected to the other gay men they met in the group, the majority of the men did, with single exceptions at either end of the scale
- ➔ 85% of the men were satisfied with the topics covered in the group, with 37% rating them as excellent
- ➔ When asked how well the group met their expectations, 100% of the members were satisfied or very satisfied
- ➔ Over 97% of participants were satisfied with the facilitator's skills
- ➔ Over 95 of all questions on the evaluation were marked satisfactory to excellent



The following is a summary of some of the comments men made about their experience in the group:

Following the first group, which was eight sessions in length and ran for ninety minutes, the unanimous feedback was that the group needed to be longer in terms of the time as well as the number of sessions. The following groups were expanded to twelve sessions and two hours in length. All groups were consistent in their feedback that they liked the topics that were generated and found the exercises helpful. The group members were also consistent in stating that they found the assignments given, which were to be done in between group sessions, both challenging and helpful. It also appeared that the group support was essential to those members who were struggling to feel comfortable with other gay men. For many, this was their first experience interacting with a group of gay men where the contact was not sexual or alcohol-related. Others had come out later in life, and were just beginning to make inroads into the community after having come to accept their sexual orientation.

For many, this was their first experience interacting with a group of gay men where the contact was not sexual or alcohol-related.

In all groups, the group members generated the topics that they wanted to cover, and so there appeared to be a high degree of ownership of the issues discussed. It was also interesting to note that there was a high degree of correlation between what the initial proposal of the group design indicated would be likely topics and what the men themselves expressed they would like to discuss.

“... this group has taught me that gay men aren’t so bad and that I can trust and like them as friends”

In summary, both groups were reported to be very helpful to the men and seen as a unique and life-changing experience. One member said he had “a feeling of belonging. It was the first time having this feeling within the gay community.” Another said, “The support was all that I had, so it meant a lot to me.” Another man concluded with “I know (the group experience) will be very helpful to me in the long run.”

One man stated, “this group has taught me that gay men aren’t so bad and that I can trust and like them as friends.” Another concluded, “when I try and imagine where I would be without the group, I realized how much it has helped.”



The Research Component of the Making Connections Groups

When designing the Making Connections groups, we hypothesized that certain factors may be impacting on the clients' ability to find, establish and maintain satisfactory relationships in the lesbian or gay community. This hypothesis came from the clients we were seeing already in individual counselling, and we thought it would be useful to administer scales that measured these factors, in order to provide a descriptive view of how the clients presented pre- and post-group. The factors we were curious about were internalized homophobia, self-esteem, and interpersonal communication.

The clients were given three scales prior to the group beginning and on the last evening. All members who finished the groups completed them.

The scales we used were Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale¹; Ross and Rosser's scale of Internalized Homophobia²; and, an Interpersonal Communication Test by Jerabek³.

An analysis of variance was conducted where interpersonal communication, self-esteem, and internalized homophobia were studied over the course of the group. What was significant in this analysis was that internalized homophobia was seen to decrease over time. Thus, it appears that internalized homophobia decreased because of the group, however, one must be cautious in this interpretation as there was neither a comparison group or any other controls placed in the study in order to make this a conclusion. However, it did appear to make some sense clinically that as the gay men and lesbians experienced the group, their internalized homophobia could be challenged.

Of interesting note, gender differences were examined and it was discovered that men had significantly higher internalized homophobia scores than women, suggesting that possibly gay men may be socialized to be more internally homophobic than women.

Of further interest was that significant co-relations were found between self-esteem and interpersonal communication skills. The results suggest a relationship where the higher the self-esteem an individual had, the more



It appears that internalized homophobia decreased because of the group



¹ Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and Adolescent Child*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

² Ross, M.W. and Rosser, S. (1996). Measurement and correlates of internalized homophobia: A Factor Analytic study. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 52(1), 15-21.

³ Jerabek, I. (1996). *Communication Skills Test*. Queendom.com.



likely they have better interpersonal communication skills. Finally, another significant co-relation was between internalized homophobia and interpersonal communication skills. The results suggest that the better one's interpersonal communications skills were, the less likely they were to be internally homophobic. Overall, these co-relations suggest relationships between self-esteem and interpersonal communications skills, and internalized homophobia and interpersonal communications skills. However, the nature of these relationships is still to be determined.

Our use of the scales was primarily to elicit descriptive data, however, our feedback identifies interesting areas of possible research in the emotional lives of gay men and lesbians.

Conclusion

The Making Connections group was an exciting and innovative venture for the David Kelley Services. The Pride and Remembrance Run gave us the opportunity to provide for the lesbian and gay communities something that was not currently available. Due to the demands on our small program, we had not been able to take an evening away from individuals and couples who needed nighttime appointments in order to provide a group program. This funding made it possible.

This was also an opportunity that made sense to us as clinicians. We were working every day with isolated gay men and lesbians who identified an inability to feel connected in their lives. It made good sense to us that a group format would be a rich and exciting forum in which to address these issues, rather than the more limited one-to-one session.

In essence, we created a microcosm of the gay/lesbian community in the group. This gave us a chance to observe how this group of gay men and lesbians connected in the room, and to provide input and feedback regarding this. Clients were then able to make linkages to what was occurring in their lives in the larger lesbian and gay community, and their attempts to make connections there.

We were heartened by the feedback of the clients, and with the success we were able to see. The clients' own testimonials verified that. We feel strongly that this is a valuable, clinically-sound way to intervene in clients' lives in order to reduce the stigma, shame and isolation gays and lesbians can be made to experience. We encourage other gay and lesbian professionals to use this manual and are confident that similar results can be achieved.



APPENDIX I

INTAKE INTERVIEW

Give brief description of group plan/intention:

(Group design drawn from needs identified by clients in community, relationship skill development focus, process and exercise components, personal contract and homework.)

1. What is it you hope to gain from a group like this?
2. In what relationships are you experiencing difficulties in making and keeping connections? How will a group experience help you to make changes in these relationships?
3. What is it you think/feel you would bring to a group like this?
4. Have you had any group work experiences before? If yes, how did it go? If not, what concerns do you have about being in a group?
5. Are you currently involved in counseling now? If yes, what will happen with this counseling while the group is happening? If not, what supports do you currently have in place that will be available during the group series? If you don't have current supports in place how will you get support?
6. In groups, people play different roles, i.e., leader, joker, quiet-one...what role do you think you will play?
7. We are asking for a commitment to 3 groups before you decide to withdraw. Is there any reason you would not be able to make this commitment?
8. Are there any issues/reasons that might prevent you from attending all 10 sessions?

Important points to cover before terminating interview:

Fee contract, missing 2 groups in a row (as grounds for demitting members), closed group, length of group and time, co-facilitated, separate groups for men/women meeting on the same night, funded by P&R, date when client will be called to start group, completion of pre-group measurement tools.



APPENDIX II

EVALUATION: WOMEN'S GROUP

Please fill out the following evaluation. We value your input.

Please use a scale from 1 to 5.

1 – not at all satisfied

2 – somewhat satisfied

3 – satisfied

4 – very satisfied

5 – excellent

1. How satisfied were you with the group experience overall? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

2. Sometimes what people expect to get from a group before they begin does not match what actually happens? How well did the group meet your expectations? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

3. Did you feel supported in this group? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

4. Did you feel safe in this group? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

5. Did you have enough opportunity to speak? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:



6. Did you feel listened to when you did speak? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

7. Were you satisfied with the topics covered? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

8. Please rate the following exercises in terms of suitability and usefulness:

Guidelines and bottom lines	1	2	3	4	5
Sociometric exercises	1	2	3	4	5
Photo exercise	1	2	3	4	5
Role Play exercise	1	2	3	4	5
Resource sharing	1	2	3	4	5
Closure exercise	1	2	3	4	5
Check in/out	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

9. Please rate the facilitators in the following areas using the 1 to 5 scale:

Group Leader #1

Approachable	1	2	3	4	5
Able to keep group focused	1	2	3	4	5
Supportive	1	2	3	4	5
Able to manage conflict in the group	1	2	3	4	5
Able to give the right amount of feedback	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledgeable about topics/issues	1	2	3	4	5
Flexible to deal with new issues presented	1	2	3	4	5
Clear about expectations for the group	1	2	3	4	5
Appeared organized and prepared	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:





Group Leader #2

Approachable	1	2	3	4	5
Able to keep group focused	1	2	3	4	5
Supportive	1	2	3	4	5
Able to manage group conflict	1	2	3	4	5
Able to give the right amount of feedback	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledgeable about topics/issues	1	2	3	4	5
Flexible to deal with new issues presented	1	2	3	4	5
Clear about expectations for the group	1	2	3	4	5
Appeared organized and prepared	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

10. Do you have any additional comments/suggestions/feedback?

Name (It is completely optional to sign this evaluation)



APPENDIX III

EVALUATION: MEN'S GROUP

Please fill out the following evaluation. We value your input.

Please use a scale from 1 to 5.

- 1 – not at all satisfied
- 2 – somewhat satisfied
- 3 – satisfied
- 4 – very satisfied
- 5 – excellent

1. How satisfied were you with the group experience overall? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

2. Sometimes what people expect to get from a group before they begin does not match what actually happens? How well did the group meet your expectations? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

3. Did you feel supported in this group? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

4. Did you feel safe to talk openly in this group? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

5. Did you have enough opportunity to speak? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

6.





Did you feel listened to when you did speak? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

7. Were you satisfied with the topics covered? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

8. Do you feel your obstacle will operate
Differently in the future now that you
are more aware of it? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

9. Do you feel more confident that you will
be able to connect with other gay men? 1 2 3 4 5

Comments:

10. Please rate the facilitators in the following areas using the 1 to 5 scale:

Nelson

Approachable	1	2	3	4	5
Able to keep group focused	1	2	3	4	5
Supportive	1	2	3	4	5
Able to manage group conflict in the group	1	2	3	4	5
Able to give the right amount of feedback	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledgeable about topics	1	2	3	4	5
Flexible to deal with new issues presented	1	2	3	4	5
Able to be clear with group regarding expectations	1	2	3	4	5
Appeared organized and prepared	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:





Peter

Approachable	1	2	3	4	5
Able to keep group focused	1	2	3	4	5
Supportive	1	2	3	4	5
Able to manage group conflict in the group	1	2	3	4	5
Able to give the right amount of feedback	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledgeable about topics	1	2	3	4	5
Flexible to deal with new issues presented	1	2	3	4	5
Able to be clear with group regarding expectations	1	2	3	4	5
Appeared organized and prepared	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

11. Do you have any additional comments/suggestions/feedback?

Name (It is completely optional to sign this evaluation)



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