

## Book Review

*Unstructured Group Therapy:  
Creating Contact, Choosing Relationship*  
By **Richard C. Page and Daniel N. Berkows**

Ross-on-Wye, UK: PCCS Books, 2005, [www.pccs-books.co.uk](http://www.pccs-books.co.uk)  
ISBN 1898059675, Cost: £17.10 , 197 pp.

Although I teach graduate group counseling courses and pride myself in my unstructured approach to group process, I have somehow missed *Unstructured Group Therapy* (Page & Berkow, 2005), first published in 1994 (Page & Berkow, 1994). This is a book that clearly, concisely, and comprehensively offers practical integration of group theory and group therapy. I review it now, one year after its revised and updated publication with PCCS Books.

*Unstructured Group Therapy* is an eight-chapter, 197-page volume addressing the history, theory, and practice of unstructured groups. There are several things about this book that I find rare and valuable. Page and Berkow make clear connections among the history, theory, and practice of unstructured groups. They also explain group concepts in a thorough, yet concise manner. This is a refreshing change from oversized texts frequently utilized in training. Additionally, the authors offer an integrated look at unstructured group therapy from a perspective that understands unstructured group work. How wonderful to read a book on group therapy that avoids hokey structured exercises, the imposition of authority onto members, and the usurpation of group member responsibility. Page and Berkow's book is a fabulous deviation from all that interferes with group member growth.

After a forward by Jerold Bozarth and a preface by the authors, Page and Berkow begin Chapter 1 with an introduction, rationale, and nature of settings for unstructured group therapy. They also discuss relationship within awareness, unstructured group process, relationship patterns and dynamics, and existential values. Process goals of unstructured group therapy are discussed in Chapter 2, along with aspects of inclusivity, authenticity, denial, feedback, problem solving, awareness, interpersonal learning, estrangement versus integration, I-Thou, and shared psychological space.

In Chapter 3 ("Self-Actualization as a Central Theme") psychoanalysis, object relations, and self-psychology are explored relevant to self-actualization. Humanistic and existential themes in group therapy are also

outlined. Further discussion includes divergent views, viable constructs, distorted forms, guilt, distortion dynamics, historical manifestations, enhancement, presentness, and part-whole relations.

It is the integration of the concepts discussed in Chapter 4 (awareness, freedom, and responsibility) with the concepts discussed in Chapter 5 (dynamics of love, power, and justice) that form the essence of unstructured group therapy. These are meaningful chapters that clearly present the gestalt of all six concepts in an integrated, concise manner.

Page and Berkow discuss the development of therapeutic process in Chapter 6, including individual/group development and individual/collective transactions. In this chapter the authors broach the concept of phases of unstructured group, specifically: preliminary socialization, ambivalence toward authority, exploration/self-revelation, mutuality, and ending. As part of Chapter 7 (responsibility and group membership), Page and Berkow explain inter-being, transferring leadership, wu-wei, differences, friendships/romantic involvements, and extension of new learning. It is here that ethics and responsibility for group members and facilitators are examined.

Page and Berkow end their book with Chapter 8 (“Application of Theory”). It is in this chapter that the authors conclude with an examination of the application of unstructured group work. Discussion includes the dimensions of a viable group, learning/leadership, and application in various settings.

Unlike other group texts, *Unstructured Group Therapy* addresses unstructured group work with continuity of theory and practice throughout the text. The authors state, “This text is written to address the need for an integrated theory of group therapy” (p. v); Page and Berkow have fulfilled this need. Their extraordinary work *Unstructured Group Therapy* is my new-found vade mecum upstaging other weighty books, and I recommend it with enthusiasm as a text for clinicians and academics.

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## References

- Page, R. C., & Berkow, D. N. (1994). *Creating contact, choosing relationship: The dynamics of unstructured group therapy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.