Many benefits, both professional and personal, accrue from group psychotherapists' adoption of a developmental perspective. The trainee or the senior practitioner; the group psychotherapist conducting groups in inpatient settings, prisons, private practices, and community mental health centers; and the group working together for a 2-week period or a 2-year period—all of these can realize the benefits of a developmental approach. Awareness of these advantages may enhance the practitioner's potential to capitalize on them. In this chapter, we delineate these benefits, focusing first on those consequences that are likely to affect favorably a therapist's effectiveness within the group and subsequently on those outcomes that also extend to the therapist's activities outside of the group. For example, some benefits are realized in the practice not only of group psychotherapy but also in modalities other than group psychotherapy. Other salubrious effects may occur in the therapist's personal as well as professional life.
In at least seven important ways, a developmental approach is likely to render a group psychotherapist's work more effective.

Training the Group Psychotherapist

For many trainees, fledgling experiences as group therapists are confusing and overwhelming events. Tracking individual members, interactions between and among members and between members and the therapist in what can be a very fast-paced session is typically quite daunting. Some trainees simplify the task by taking an individual therapy approach within the group. In this format, the therapist moves from member to member, interacting with each member for a segment of time on an individual basis. When such an approach is used, the trainee deprives him- or herself of the unique properties of the group that give it potency. Indeed, meta-analytic studies of group-level approaches have generally shown that group psychotherapy fares better in relation to individual psychotherapy when the former focuses on the group rather than on the individual members and their histories (Fuhriman & Burlingame, 1994). We suggest that developmental thinking provides an antidote to perplexity. The developmental model offers "a road map to follow and provide a sense of what [the therapist] can generally expect at different times in the life of the group" (Brossart, Patton, & Wood, 1998, p. 5).

Consider the case of two trainees who co-led a group in an AIDS treatment facility:

The trainees had been surprised that despite their inexperience as group leaders, their first 3 sessions of a 10-session group had gone well. Members took turns telling the stories of their illness and offering one another compassion over their suffering, physical and psychological. In Session 4, however, members seemed to be sniping at one another. Some members took the position that the solution to difficulties lay in each member's willingness to take responsibility. Other members complained about individuals in their lives who impeded them from happiness and productivity. For example, one woman spoke about her work supervisor, who seemed irritated at the amount of time she was absent from work. Whereas some members argued that she should strive to avoid absences even when not feeling well, others placed the blame for her difficulties on the supervisor's shoulders. Some wondered whether she was demanding too much from herself in working at all; a few members offered her tips on finding a new position; other members sulkily sat in silence.

The trainees were disturbed to note that the atmosphere of the group was contentious. Interventions to encourage members to respond to one another with greater kindness and warmth were to no avail. After the session ended, the trainees wondered whether the session could have "made some members worse." They could not understand why the group...
had changed so much from one session to the next and why members seemed to be going off in so many directions. They were glad they were meeting with their supervisor later in the day.

The supervisor helped the trainees see that the appearance of agreement in the initial sessions was likely at the cost of acknowledgment of differences. Hence what seemed to the trainees to be manifestations of deterioration in the group were actually evidence of progress: Members were feeling sufficiently secure to share reactions that could (and did) increase tension. The relief in this realization enabled the trainees to use their resources to understand what themes united members’ seemingly disparate offerings. The supervisor helped the trainees appreciate that members were grappling with the question of how to deal with their conflicting longings to be taken care of and to assume responsibility for their own lives. The supervisor suggested that this conflict has universality and must be addressed within every life. Although different members were representing different sides of the conflict, the supervisor noted, the conflict existed not only within each member but also within the group as a whole. In the supervision session, the trainees went on to explore the emotional reactions they had within the session.

Without the trainees’ gaining some understanding of the phenomena emerging in the group session, a number of negative consequences could ensue. The trainees could have shifted their style of intervening within the group. From such a shift, the almost inevitable inference for members to draw would be that the expression of disagreement is unacceptable to authority. Members’ ensuing interactions would be ostensibly affable but superficial. The trainees might also have developed a wariness of group process, a worrisome conclusion given the evidence that approaches emphasizing group process have more favorable outcomes (Fuhriman & Burlingame, 1994). Finally, the trainees could easily have lost confidence in their ability to develop as group psychotherapists, an unwarranted conclusion given members’ behavior in the session, which any experienced group psychotherapist would anticipate.

A full use of a developmental perspective would also help the trainees work together more effectively as a team. Over time, relationships between cotherapists vary in tenor. At times, the cotherapists may work together in synchrony and at other times be at loggerheads; at times, they may be mutually supportive and at other times, competitive. Greene, Rosencrantz, and Muth (1985) demonstrated that the dynamics between a cotherapy pair is affected in part by the dynamics of the group itself. For example, the trainees in our illustration may have noticed themselves becoming fractious in their attitude toward one another, and this feature relates back to the tensions among the members. By recognizing that at any time the cotherapy relationship becomes permeated with the developmental phenomena within the group, therapists benefit from reflecting on their own interactions.
A developmental perspective not only helps the therapist understand the group better but also provides direction as to potentially useful interventions at different points in group life. These intervention implications are described in chapter 6.

**Using Time Therapeutically**

Group developmental thinking helps the group psychotherapist acknowledge the role of time in the psychological lives of members. As Arrow, Poole, Henry, Wheelan, and Moreland (2004) observed, "How group members think about time and collective group norms about the meaning of time shape the way a group handles temporal matters" (p. 76). Any particular time span—be it eight sessions, 3 months, or into perpetuity—provides both opportunities and challenges. Groups aware of a distinct time limit, particularly if that time limit is brief, have a special pressure to make progress. This pressure can lead the group to be courageous in tackling work that otherwise might be put off. Additionally, as MacKenzie (1994a) noted, "The member must deal with the necessity of accepting that not enough therapy will be experienced" (p. 257).

Conversely, the pressure may limit the breadth and depth of work. Members may be less inclined to pursue the tributaries of their troubles; they could thereby fail to discover psychological elements residing in those tributaries that may have more importance to the their central difficulties than was evident initially. When time is at least putatively unlimited, members can be more expansive in the goals they are willing to set. The standard of relevance becomes less despotic. However, members may have a diminished incentive to delve into painful matters given that they can console themselves with the availability of future sessions for such work.

How members relate to time provides a portal to their relationships with time outside of the group, and for many group members, such as Alanna, the mismanagement of time is a factor that hinders the maintenance of stable relationships:

The group, in its 7th of 12 sessions, had been underway for 15 minutes when Alanna entered the room. As she sat down, she said with some measure of charm, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm just hopeless when it comes to being where I need to be when I need to be there." She giggled lightly and then said, "Well, what have we been talking about?"

Imani began to recount the exchanges that had taken place, but Tony interrupted, saying that he resented having to proceed through this weekly exercise. The group was silent for a moment, and members shifted uncomfortably in their seats.

Imani said, "Alanna has shared with us all the work pressures on her. I think we are here to be understanding of one another."
Tony retorted, "Yes, but her lateness is affecting the rest of us. Every
time she comes in late—and I think she was on time only for the first
session—we have to start over. We never really recapture where we were."

Laurie added, "We have only five sessions after today. We can't afford
to be having replays of sessions during the sessions. I don't feel I've made
nearly enough progress to be able to leave."

Alanna responded, "Imani, thank you for defending me, and I do have
a lot of pressures at work, but the truth is, I am always late for everything.
It doesn't matter if I have pressure or not. I am late for meetings at work,
and in fact, it is legendary. I have been written up for this problem. But I
keep repeating it and I am probably more frustrated by it than anyone in
this room."

Members then showed curiosity about Alanna's lateness and briefly
questioned her about the experiences that evening that led to the late-
ess. She revealed that she thought of leaving earlier for the session but
had a picture of herself arriving early and having to sit with the therapist.
Other members shared that they had this same apprehension and that
some waited in the hall to avoid this possibility. Members laughed as
they shared fantasies about the awkward conversations they might have
with the therapist during the delay.

The therapist wondered aloud what it was that led members to chal-
lenge Alanna in this session as opposed to earlier sessions. Members talked
about how its being the seventh session had special significance—less
than half of the time in the group remained. Members talked about their
goals for the group and the disparity between where they were now and
where they hoped to be on leaving the group. Being reminded of mem-
bers' presenting problems, members indicated that they would be more
able to assist one another to find opportunities to address these issues
within the group. In Alanna's case, the issue was a sense of never being
able to marshal her talents effectively to have a career rather than merely
a job. Tony said he believed that her sense of stagnating was connected
to the chronic lateness, and he hoped they could figure out how. Alanna
agreed that such an investigation held promise for helping her in rela-
tion to the frustration that brought her into the group.

In the seventh session of a long-term group, a member such as Tony
might well have confronted Alanna. However, particularly in the early phases
of group life, the members may have lacked sufficient impetus to tolerate the
discomfort of conflict and rally around his challenge. In the present group,
members' worry about the passing of time emboldened them to support Tony's
effort to discourage breeches of the temporal boundaries of the group.

In a long-term group, for example, Alanna may discover that her fear of
being alone with the therapist masks a wish to have the therapist's exclusive
attention. She may gain recognition of a sense of deprivation that is tied to
this longing. Whether any given member can develop such awareness in
either a short- or long-term group depends on a great variety of factors, in-
cluding personality characteristics such as psychological mindedness (Piper,
Rosie, Joyce, & Azim, 1996). Nonetheless, all factors being equal, more thoroughgoing explorations and insights are likely to be accomplished to the extent that members have time to engage in them.

Using Context Therapeutically

An emphasis on group development is conducive to the therapist's acknowledging the context of psychological work. The Western focus on individuality has resulted in an insufficient recognition and exploration of how an individual's context affects his or her experience and behavior and vice versa. A group developmental vantage inherently entails an examination of culture in several respects. A group's current patterns of interactions can be explored in the context of both its past and its aspirations for its future. An individual member's experience and behavior are contextually understood in relation to the operative group dynamic as well as that member's own cultural background and intrapsychic, interpersonal, and relational present, history, and aspirations for the future. Consider Sal's behavior in a psychotherapy group:

Sal came to the group bearing holiday presents for members of a 9-month-old group. As he distributed them, members' manifestations of pleasure and gratitude seemed strained and restrained. Although the members opened their gifts, the therapist kept her gift unwrapped in front of her. The therapist asked Sal how he felt about the group's reaction to his presents. He said he thought he had surprised them.

Another member observed, "Sal, I think you may be disappointed in our response. I hope you know if we seem uncomfortable, it's not a rejection of you but we're not sure if it is all right for us to be accepting presents in here."

Tasmia said, "Susan [the therapist] hasn't opened her gift. I'm not sure I should have opened mine."

Franklin said, "I think we're just getting neurotic over this. Everyone gives gifts at the holidays and that's what Sal did."

Tasmia rejoined, "Yes, but these relationships we have are not everyday kinds of relationships. Don't get me wrong: I think Sal's bringing us all presents is very sweet. However, if we do in here what we do out in the world, then this loses its specialness. We were told in the beginning that we should try to put our feelings and urges into words so we can understand them. That means, to me, that if we want to give a gift, we should talk about how we want to do it and not do it."

Sal responded, "Well, I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to violate any rule. It's just I can't imagine having the kind of important relationship that I do with each of you and not giving the person a present. It just doesn't compute for me. If you want, you can give the gifts back. Maybe I was naive about something I should have understood better."
Clearly, Sal's gesture poses a problem for the group in that the members and the therapist want on the one hand to protect the verbalization norm that has been established in the group and on the other hand to safeguard Sal's self-esteem. In this circumstance, the group's and the therapist's analysis of context can provide insights contributing to the conflict's resolution. The group's history is one contextual feature. Earlier in the group, the members may have partaken in a barometric event in which the group revolted against the therapist in an expression that contained both verbal and nonverbal components. An example of a nonverbal expression would be members conspiring to arrive late to a given session or to configure themselves in some nonstandard seating arrangement. The group's recognition of its own strides would create a reluctance to return to a mode associated with an earlier era in its life. At the same time, some members of the group are likely to feel sympathetic toward Sal's joining efforts and wary of a more Spartan posture toward one another.

Insight into Sal's and other members' cultural backgrounds may provide a source of information concerning the different modes of relating to which members are drawn. For example, the group may learn that Sal's cultural background requires gifts as regular accompaniments of holidays such that for Sal to fail to provide a gift at a holiday is to declare that person as insignificant to him. For other members, gift giving may carry a different implication—for example, it may signify that a relationship of intimacy exists, and some members may find disturbing the notion that their 9-month-old relationships with the other members are intimate. For still others, as in the case of Tasmia, gifts represent the conventional and the mundane and as such, signify a trivialization of members' relationships with one another.

In the same way that a child's maturation is studied in terms of his or her family environment, developmentalists investigate the group in terms of the forces impinging on it (such as boundary intrusions that create instabilities in the group, limiting its development) and how the group and its transpirings affect the broader environment. Often these group–environment relationships are seen with particular salience when treatment takes place in a broader treatment context, such as a residential treatment center or day hospital:

Three of the eight group members were denied passes to leave the unit because of behavior that was disrespectful to the staff and other residents (loud swearing in the hall). The members of the group were split between those who felt that the punishment was deserved and those involved in the transgression who saw staff members as overreacting. In the session, members responded in a testy manner toward one another. The therapist acknowledged members' differences but wondered aloud.

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1An example of such a nonverbal expression in one author's experience was to arrive in the group session only to find all members sitting on the floor rather than in their chairs.
whether there was not something that all of the members shared: their annoyance in the last session at the therapist for not responding to a direct question that would signify the therapist's support of one faction of the group or another. One member, agreeing that she had been exasperated on leaving the session, indicated that the events of the group had contributed to her yelling in the hall. She was roundly supported in this claim by the other members who had engaged in the sanctioned behavior. One member said, "I'm not saying it's your [the therapist's] fault, but I do think you had a big role." Other members doubted whether the group events could have been of sufficient importance to create that outcome but, in a milder way, did question whether the therapist's reticence was prudent. The therapist said he thought that the group did indeed take their frustration with him out into the unit and that the loud swearing may have been the kind of expressiveness they would have liked to have achieved in the group but felt they could not. This comment was followed by a discussion of members' perception of themselves as being far more contained in the group and in other modalities than outside and a sense of artificiality associated with that containment. Even the quieter members talked about feeling relieved in hearing the loud swearing—that finally, some residents were expressing themselves in a way that seemed real.

As we discuss in chapter 5 of this volume, the members were grappling with a developmental concern that comes predictably in the early but not earliest life of the group: that conflicts that are activated—in this case the conflict between open expression of hostility toward authority and fears of the consequences of such an expression—are ones members take into the world with them. When the context is sufficiently contained such that the therapist can take stock of it, then that context becomes a valuable source of information and illustration for the therapist to use to move the group along its developmental journey.

Comprehensive Accounting of Group Phenomena

The life of the group can be understood from the vantage of different levels of analysis. One level is the individual member and his or her behaviors, reactions, conflicts, fantasies, and so on. The interaction between members, and between each member and the therapist, constitutes another level. Members also can form into subgroups in which a set with similar but not identical positions in relation to an issue becomes a working unit. Finally, the group as a whole—its atmosphere, themes, interactional patterns—offers another tier of analysis.

The different levels of analysis are like different lenses on a camera—each level offers a potentially useful perspective on the group phenomena. As such, each level is a resource. Some approaches focus exclusively on a given level of analysis. For example, an interpersonal approach gives great
attention to dyadic interactional patterns but little focus on group, subgroup and group-as-a-whole levels. When the interpersonal therapist focuses exclusively on interactions to the neglect of broader themes, the therapist will be denying him- or herself and the group a resource. He or she will be ignoring data on the big picture into which individual interactions fit. A particular advantage of a group developmental view is that it encompasses consideration of all units of analysis in the system of the group. As the following vignette and its discussion suggest, a developmental focus allows for a great deal of flexibility in the level at which both analysis and intervention occur:

Dennis ambled into a morning group session late, saying he was tired from watching a TV show the night before. One member asked what the show was, and Dennis mentioned a common espionage show that all of the members recognized—yet, only Iona and Sheldon expressed enthusiasm for it. These three members began a lively discussion for 5 minutes when another member, Fatima, interrupted them and said, “I don’t think the show is a reason for being late, and I don’t think talking about it is a good use of the group’s time.”

Dennis gave an exaggerated look of being taken aback and said, “Aren’t we hoity-toity?” Sheldon laughed.

Marion, glaring at both Sheldon and Dennis, replied, “I don’t appreciate your tone of mockery, and I think Fatima is absolutely correct. When someone’s late, we just lose our focus. I think it’s rude to the therapist and inconsiderate, and your celebrating it with this frivolous conversation makes it that much worse.”

Iona added, “You know—that’s what gets on my nerves about the group. If we’re not serious every second, it’s worthless. Couldn’t there be something good about our sharing our interests outside of this group? Isn’t there something good about not talking about our problems every second but taking a moment to talk about what brings us joy?”

Dennis said, “Yeah, and besides, she [the therapist] said we were supposed to communicate openly. To me, that means talking about . . . whatever.”

Fatima responded, “Very clever . . . using the therapist’s own words to break the rule of showing up on time and wasting time.” Lewis said, “For once I was enjoying our conversation, but you’re ruining it. He was late by only a few minutes, and talking about the show was fun.”

The therapist experiencing this segment of group life could respond on a range of levels. The therapist could focus at the level of the individual member such as Fatima and ponder how her reaction fits into her own psychology. Why was she the one to interrupt the conversation? Might this behavior, particularly her insistence on adherence to group rules, represent a strong identification with authority? If so, what are the social consequences of this identification? As Iona suggested, does Fatima (along with others) have a constricted capacity for play, and if so, what toll does it take on the forging of intimate connections? The therapist could focus on Fatima’s tra-
jectory through the group and help her to create a narrative that allows for varied options in responding to peers.

Alternatively, the therapist could focus at the subgroup level. If the reader were asked what alliances had formed in the group, certainly the connections between the subgroup of Dennis, Iona, and possibly Sheldon and Lewis and that of Fatima and Marion would be salient. The therapist might consider how each member in these subgroups could find comfort in being in the group but use that comfort to understand his or her unique position in relation to the issue at hand. For example, Fatima may realize that for her, the importance of observing rules is paramount, whereas for Marion, protecting the leader against any challenge is key. Ultimately this greater awareness of how members differ from one another could facilitate members’ identifying with individuals who are in other subgroups, and these broadened identifications might help participants achieve an expanded, more robust sense of self. Hence the subgroup-oriented therapist actively promotes the formation of subgroups and guides them to maximize members’ learning (Agazarian, 1997).

The group psychotherapist also could focus at the level of the group as a whole. This therapist would ask, “How do the actions and reactions of this individual member (or subset of members) function as voices of trends within the group as a whole?” The therapist might wonder how Dennis’s tardiness and the poverty of his excuse reveal a psychological element that is shared by all members (even if not consciously accessible). The therapist might speculate that Dennis was serving as a bellwether for a burgeoning restlessness with the rules of the group.

The flexibility of the unit of analysis within a developmental conceptualization broadens the range of clinical situations in which it can be applied. For example, certain populations may require a more individual focus. A group of individuals who are being seen immediately following a trauma may require the comfort of individual attention, particularly in the earliest stage of development. A group of sex offenders may find an individual focus too evocative of shame, the burden of which is more distributed (and hence manageable) when the group psychotherapist intervenes at the level of the subgroup and the group as a whole. Also, certain therapists may have a level of intervention more compatible with their personality styles. An individual unit of analysis is likely to be associated with a more behaviorally active therapist. Time frame also may affect the level of analysis that is optimal. For example, in short-term psychotherapy, the therapist may require the efficiency of subgroup- and group-level interventions.

Process and Outcome Relationships

Thinking about group development draws the therapist’s attention to links between process and outcome. That is, by understanding the workings
of a group, the therapist can more fully tap the potential of the group to benefit its members (Wheelan, 1999). Research (e.g., see McRoberts, Burlingame, & Hoag, 1998; Toseland & Siporin, 1986) provides a strong indication of the benefits of group psychotherapy. Yet, to maximize the potential benefits of group, knowledge of how those benefits are achieved is needed. Research on specific factors is useful in helping the therapist to negotiate the moment-to-moment events that constitute a session:

Soledad had been reticent throughout the seven sessions of an eight-session day hospital group. Her occasional comments seemed less on topic than those of other members and were typically met with an awkward silence. In the last session, members were giving one another summative feedback. Soledad interrupted as members were providing feedback to another member, saying, "I want to know what you all think of me. Now don't hold back. I want to know everything."

This open-ended invitation provided the therapist with a dilemma. Knowing that Soledad would be likely to receive feedback that would highlight her relational insufficiencies, the therapist could either support this process, structure it so that it had a particular character, or prevent the feedback to Soledad altogether.

Here the therapist's knowledge of process-outcome relationships could come to her rescue. On the one hand, the finding that members who receive more feedback have more favorable outcomes (Flowers & Booraem, 1990) might compel the therapist to encourage members to offer feedback to Soledad. On the other hand, research has shown that constructive or negative feedback is rarely experienced as helpful when it is offered in the absence of positive feedback. Furthermore, positive feedback should generally precede negative feedback (see Brabender, 2006). These findings argue in favor of the therapist's structuring the feedback. For example, she might ask members what strengths they have noted in how Soledad participated in the group. If the therapist anticipated that members would not be forthcoming with positive feedback, she might offer her own feedback to Soledad. Investigators (e.g., Tschuschke & Dies, 1994) have observed that critical feedback is less helpful when it is given at the end of the group, especially when members have not been receiving it throughout the group. This finding suggests that the therapist should be chary of Soledad's reception of negative feedback at the end of the group.

Group developmental models account not only for what processes are important but also for how those processes are activated and how they depend on one another. For example, it is not enough to know that feedback is helpful to members' achievement of a more adaptive interpersonal style. What is necessary for members to use feedback? Group developmental theory points to members' engagement with one another, an engagement that occurs very early in the life of the group. The therapist, cognizant of the relationship...
between engagement and feedback, can from the group's inception work vigorously to promote each member's active involvement with the other members of the group. In our example, the therapist, noting Soledad's reticence, might have worked energetically from the beginning of the group to ensure that Soledad would be thoroughly engaged with the other members. Hence, ultimately, the knowledge of the interrelationship of processes over time and their relationship with outcome provides a blueprint for intervention.

Relationships Between Psychotherapy Groups and Other Types of Groups

A focus on group development allows for an appreciation of the interconnections among different types of groups. One of the unfortunate aspects of the history of group psychotherapy is the divide that has existed between efforts to understand group phenomena as they come into being in a therapeutic setting and such phenomena in other types of contexts such as work settings. Historically, there has been less of this compartmentalization in group development research. Prominent group developmental writers such as Tuckman (1965) have given attention to the differences and similarities among therapy groups, groups devoted to personal enhancement, and task groups. Probably the most prominent similarity is that developmental potential, the capacity of a group to grow, exists among all types of groups.

In this book, we attempt to continue this integrative tradition within group developmental theory and research through our effort to weave the insights that can be obtained from social psychology and the study of work or task groups into developmental applications of the psychotherapy group. Contemporary psychotherapy groups take many forms. Indeed, some structured applications, such as cognitive and behavioral groups, may be closer to task groups in employment settings than to process-oriented groups. Accordingly, the vast literature on developmental aspects of task groups could offer possibilities of how developmental concepts could be used in those structured models in which they have not historically been accessed by practitioners.

Compatibility of Group Development Theory With Emerging Paradigms

Group developmental thinking is potentially compatible with emerging intellectual paradigms, a compatibility that ensures that group developmental theory can be continually updated by new theoretical and empirical discoveries. These discoveries at times have made new techniques available to the group psychotherapist.

This notion of compatibility among particular paradigms is one that we develop much further in this book, but several examples are in order here. First, group developmental thinking has been integrated with complexity
theory by many writers (e.g., Brabender, 1997; Wheelan & Williams, 2003). Furthermore, preliminary research studies such as those by Wheelan and Williams (2003) demonstrated that progressive stage models and complexity theory each account for different aspects of how groups change. Together, they provide a more adequate picture of the predictable transformations that occur in groups over time. Second, group developmental approaches have been successfully integrated with new narrative approaches as we show in detail in chapter 5 of this volume. The group creates its own story over time, with each developmental stage providing a segment of the plot. Narrative approaches enable the group psychotherapist to make optimal use of the group's and each member's individual stories. Third, group developmental approaches have been integrated with change models describing change in phasic terms.

In chapter 3 of this volume, we outline the history of thinking on change in groups. As we discuss, some theoreticians see the group as phasic, that is, alternating between states such as work states and basic assumption states. These approaches, although different from the progressive stage models to be explored in this text, have descriptive value in capturing certain aspects of group life. MacKenzie's (1990) model shows how phasic and stage elements can be integrated into a single model.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS

The benefits of developmental thinking to the therapist's personal life and professional life beyond conducting psychotherapy groups are discussed in the two sections that follow.

Using Groups to Pursue Goals Beyond the Alleviation of Suffering

A group developmental focus has compatibility with a positive psychology perspective. The stages of development do not merely characterize the maturation of persons with psychopathology; the stages, at least as they are construed in most major theories, are universal and describe the ways in which humans reckon with progressively more complex issues. Although groups with a developmental focus can be conducted to lessen suffering, they may also be used to enable individuals to grow—to achieve greater happiness in life and to be more successful in meeting goals. Accordingly, the skills the therapist cultivates in conducting psychotherapy groups from a developmental perspective, with some adaptation, can be transferred to other types of groups such as wellness-oriented groups.

For example, Ellen Daniell (2006) wrote about a group of female scientists who met every other Thursday in a problem-solving group to explore the challenges of having an academic career. Daniell wrote about the group's
achievement of cohesion, the members’ developing self-knowledge, and the members’ ability to function more effectively in their careers. Yet, in this type of group, members’ knowledge of group developmental stages (and indeed, the members of this group could tacitly or explicitly have had such knowledge) could be useful at points at which such a group hits a snag. For example, were members to feel irritated with one another, they could explore the hypothesis that the irritation was specific to some group-level developmental tension, such as the restiveness of early Stage 2 of our five-stage model of group development (see chap. 4, this volume), when members are beginning to recognize differences with one another.

During the many years in which Virginia Brabender presented the developmental stages in her introductory group psychotherapy course, the students were invariably astonished at how well the stages described the history of their own interactions. At the time the students took the course, they were in the fall semester of their 3rd year of training in a 5-year program. They had gone through the first 2 years as a cohort, spending approximately 18 hours together each week. In the 1st year of training, the students were sanguine and nurtured idealized views of the program, the faculty, and one another. Typically in the 2nd year of training, the students experienced some dissatisfaction and disillusionment, and students showed irritation with one another and resentments of program requirements. By the 3rd year, students showed a new seriousness of purpose, and relationships with one another achieved a new level of constructiveness. Hearing about the stages of group development in the introductory class provided students with a sense of coherence and reasonableness to their changing reactions to the interpersonal dimensions of their academic experience.

Development of the Person of the Group Psychotherapist

Awareness of group development is conducive to the growth of the group psychotherapist. To do effective work within a given stage, the group psychotherapist must be aware of what affects and yearnings are stimulated by the conflicts and tasks of the stage. Developmentally based self-focusing, particularly when abetted by supervision or exploration with a cotherapist, enables the therapist to gain greater access to and insight into psychological elements than he or she may have achieved earlier in his or her development. In this way, the therapist is given an opportunity to complete developmental tasks more thoroughly and resolve conflicts more satisfactorily than may have been done previously. In this regard, consider the following illustration:

Two mental health professionals had begun a psychotherapy group; one of them, Dr. Kerry, had had a great deal of experience, and the other, Ms. Storr, had a very limited fund of group work. Ms. Storr was participating in the group to gain greater experience and to learn from Dr. Kerry. During the most recent sessions, Ms. Storr had been a focus of the group as
members devalued her for her junior status and other perceived deficiencies. Dr. Kerry had been quite impressed with Ms. Storr’s robustness and resilience in the face of this attack. The group moved from Ms. Storr to Dr. Kerry, whom they decried for a different set of weaknesses pertaining more to negligence (in holding back her knowledge) rather than inadequacy.

After the group had expressed a good deal of dissatisfaction, it entered a period in which members showed a benign but more indifferent stance toward the therapists. They lightheartedly talked about the possibility of one member having an affair as a means of coping with her marital difficulties. During these sessions, Dr. Kerry had noticed that Ms. Storr appeared limp and melancholy. In their regular debriefing, Dr. Kerry asked Ms. Storr if she felt that she [Ms. Storr] was having any particular reaction to the transpirings in the group. Ms. Storr said that she found recent sessions to be boring, not nearly as stimulating as those in which the members were expressing their disappointment with the cotherapists. Dr. Kerry wondered whether Ms. Storr found it gratifying to be in the spotlight, even if the attention received was negative. Ms. Storr initially expressed some amusement at this possibility but then ruefully added that she wanted to discuss the matter with her therapist.

Ms. Storr followed through with her plan to explore with her individual therapist the psychological underpinnings of her ennui, precipitated by the members’ appearing less interested in her. She discovered that being in the limelight, for good or ill, secured her mother’s attention at a very early age. Her prodigious verbal abilities as a toddler and then a young child enabled her to garner the amazement of all adults in her surroundings. Her mother responded to their reaction as a great personal triumph and showed Ms. Storr abundant affection. However, when circumstances did not allow her mother to obtain this vicarious affirmation, Ms. Storr wilted in the same way that she did in the session. Ms. Storr came to associate loss with any sequence of events that placed her out of the spotlight. This aspect of her interpersonal relationships and its roots had not appeared with the same clarity earlier in treatment. Ms. Storr’s ability to access the hurt underlying her seeming uninterest enabled her not only to show more consistent vitality in the group but also to more clearly understand her reactions to events in her personal life involving the same or similar social stimuli.

In our example, Ms. Storr used both supervision and personal therapy as means of learning from her group experience. For seasoned therapists, it is often possible to engage in self-exploration by using the internal and external data from the sessions to do productive personal work.

CONCLUSIONS

The benefits of a group developmental approach are manifold. This perspective is highly useful for new group psychotherapists who are attempt-
ing to understand what might otherwise be a chaotic array of events that unfold in any session. Group developmental theory also helps the trainee understand how his or her reactions and interactions with the cotherapist fit into a broader group dynamic. This understanding is one that integrates observations and research findings from both psychotherapy groups and groups conducted outside of a therapeutic context. This elucidating role of developmental theory is a feature that should characterize any good theory. For example, any model, be it cognitive-behavioral theory or interpersonal theory, can serve this function: It can tell the group therapist what he or she is seeing and why. However, group developmental theory distinguishes itself from many other approaches in that its constructs do not sacrifice the complexity and richness of group phenomena. It provides a structure into which events can fit at both micro- and macrolevels. A related benefit of group developmental theory is that it fosters an appreciation of the context of group events. Group developmental theory not only permits an analysis of different levels of specificity in the group but also provides the theoretical equipment to see how these units are related to one another. As such, it is both aesthetically and intellectually satisfying.

Satisfactions notwithstanding, the purpose of group psychotherapy is to effect the amelioration of psychological difficulties, and group developmental theory provides the means to do so. Specifically, group developmental theory offers the means to characterize group process. It enables the investigator to study how variations in process mediate outcome. In chapter 3 of this volume, we provide evidence for the links between developmental processes and a range of outcomes. For the present, suffice it to say that a developmental perspective serves the cardinal goal of helping the therapist conduct the group more effectively.

Group developmental thinking assists the therapist in work outside of the group. The contextual understanding required for group developmental work provides a deepened understanding of how an individual's context affects his or her internal life and behavior. It also provides the therapist with the tools to participate as leader or member in groups that aim to enhance functioning.

Finally, the group developmental approach potentially contributes to the maturation of the group psychotherapist as a person. This potential is likely to be realized most fully if insights garnered from the group receive further analysis in therapy or supervision.