

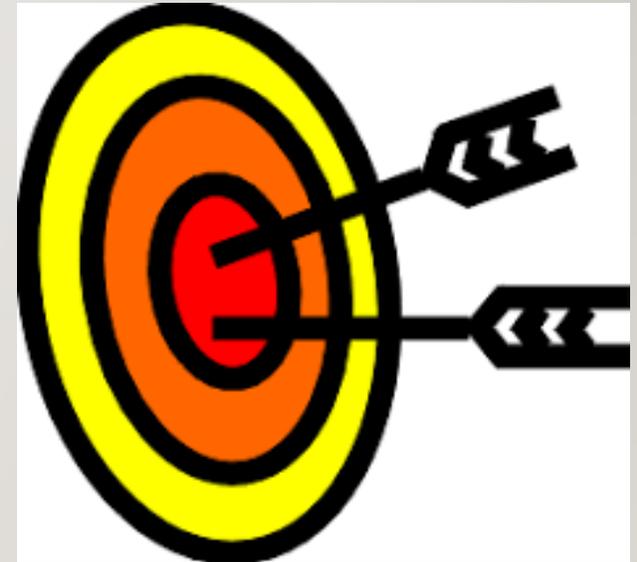


Online Group Analysis

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OBJECTIVES

1. State the impact of the lack of the body on Internet delivered therapy.
2. Explain the need for specific training for online therapists.
3. Apply ethical considerations to leading online groups.
4. Compare online and f2f therapy.
5. Identify ways to develop presence online.
6. State some research findings about online therapy groups.



MY OWN EXPERIENCE WITH ONLINE GROUPS (FORUM AND ZOOM)

- The g-p forum
- Teaching groups online
- Process groups with students in Israel and Singapore
- Process groups with therapists in China, Japan and the USA.
- Publications

TWO FORMS OF ONLINE THERAPY GROUPS

- A-synchronic groups
(Internet Groups/Forums, WeChat, WhatsApp)
- Synchronic groups
(Skype, Zoom, VSee)

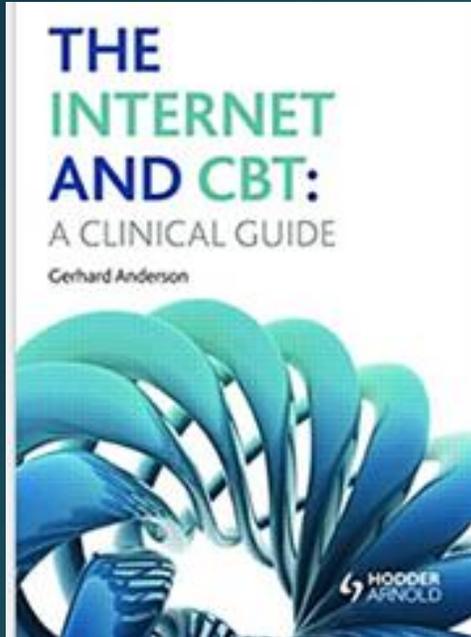
Legal Considerations

- ▶ Remember the loose boundaries and take measures to ensure confidentiality
- ▶ Add an online informed consent (location of group member?)
- ▶ Do not practice across state borders (in the USA)
- ▶ Comply with HIPPA standards (in the USA. Waived in the current crisis)

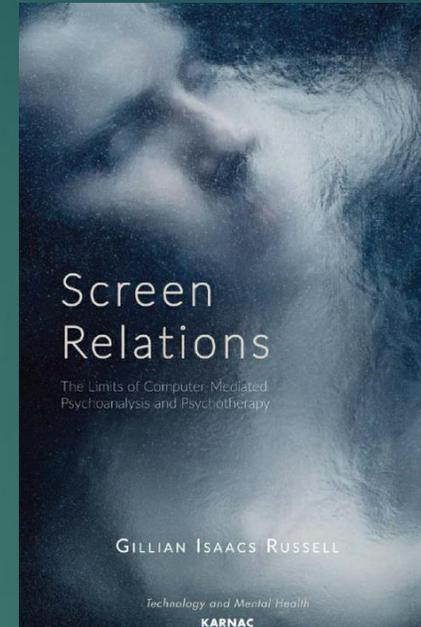
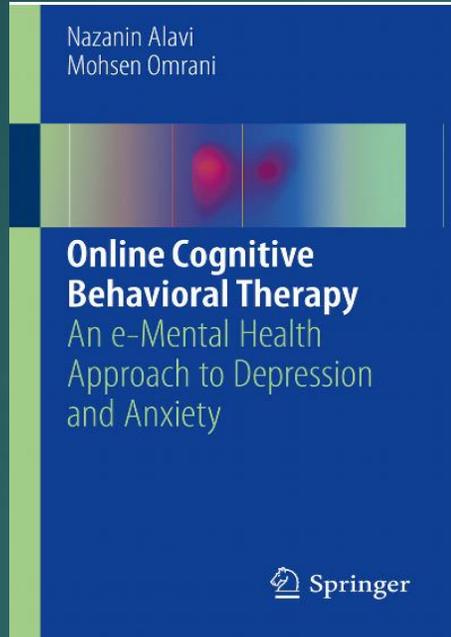
Interview with Jill Scharff



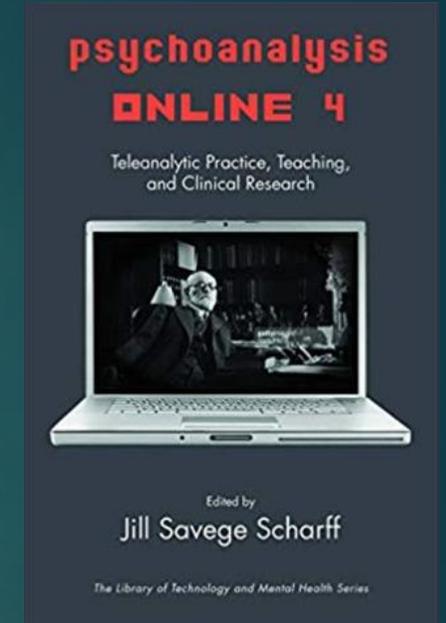
Online Therapy: Two trains of thought



The Technique camp



The Relationship camp

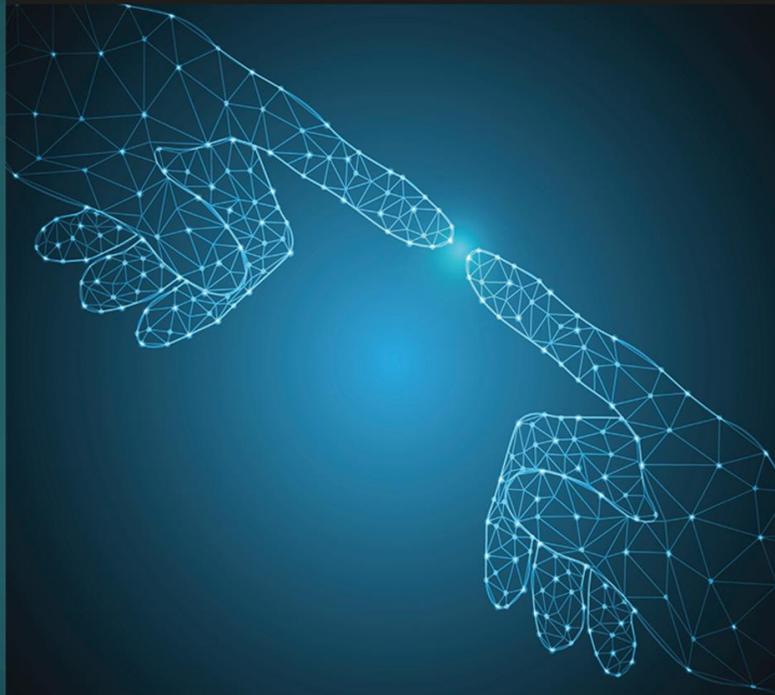




Theory and Practice of Online Therapy

Internet-delivered Interventions for Individuals,
Groups, Families, and Organizations

Edited by Haim Weinberg and Arnon Rolnick



Integration between two approaches



Quick Guide to Teletherapy Platforms

Platform Name	Meets HIPAA Standards*	Free/Paid	Individual/Group
www.doxy.me	YES	Free version & Paid	Individual; Group (paid version only)
zoom.us	YES	Paid (\$200/mo)	Both
regroupconnect.com	YES	Free	Both
www.securevideo.com Uses ZOOM and vSee	YES	Value (\$25/mo - 5 sessions) or Unlimited (\$50/mo)	Both
www.vsee.com	YES (basic BAA & comprehensive)	Free (25 session) or Paid (\$50/mo)	Individual
Clocktree	YES	\$29/mo \$59/mo \$89/mo (billed by hour)	Individual
Spruce	YES	\$24/mo \$49/mo	Both

*Meeting HIPAA Standards means that the company will sign a Business Associate Agreement. Please reference applicable state and federal laws

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I. Internet Forums

Internet Text Based Groups

- ▶ No solid space or time boundaries
- ▶ Lack of clear boundaries should restrict the possibility of group cohesion, reduce the sense of safety, and limit intimate talk
- ▶ Surprisingly, cohesion is achieved and self-disclosure is high despite loose boundaries

Intimacy versus E-ntimacy©

Intimacy requires privacy, and involves self-disclosure, lowering of personal boundaries, I-Thou relationship.

E-ntimacy©, involves belonging, influence and confluence. It is based on a fantasy of similarity and develops when two or more people agree to have a relationship without involving a body.

Online Group Dynamics in Forums

- ▶ *Small versus Large Group*

It is a Large Group “in the dark” with the illusion of a small group

- ▶ *Projection is massive*

- ▶ *Internet forums enhance the capacity to be alone in the presence of the others*

The ability to play with the other forum members, keeping their virtual presence in mind, transforms the physical embodied group into an imagined virtual internalized group (but no way to check the therapist's capacity to survive)

Synchronic Chat Group vignette

← → ↻ sitesapp.7chairs.org/my-groups/603?session=c28b5061eb68470f4e637c81eac791e0&phone=%2B972545677673&user=y5v3OZp4ejtVU&group_id=603 ☆ 👤 ⋮



← I am more then just my psoriasis



Yohnit



Mimi



Benny



Sam



Sarah



Lee

6

Notes to myself

Write your notes here



II. Internet process groups using video





MAIN OBSTACLES IN MOVING FROM THE CIRCLE TO THE SCREEN

1. Losing control of the setting
2. The disembodied environment
3. The question of presence
4. Ignoring the background.

1. The Problem with the Setting

- ▶ **Who is responsible for the setting?**
 - ▶ “A bed is not a couch and a car is not a consulting room”
 - ▶ The importance of testing the boundaries
 - ▶ The choice to protect the session becomes the patient’s responsibility

Dynamic administration (Foulkes)

- ▶ Foulkes focused on the importance of the “dynamic administration”. The group leader takes charge of the administration of the group's setting and translates 'external material' brought within these boundaries as matter pertaining to the dynamic flow of communication 'here and now'
- ▶ Administrative functions provide the group with a sense of safety and continuity, and enhance a dynamic flow of communication
- ▶ It means that the administrative function of the group leader has a dynamic meaning
- ▶ Some of the administrative functions (such as arranging the chairs in a circle) are absent online
- ▶ The group leader can compensate for their absence with some technical skills (registration of the members to the forum. Instructions how to use Zoom)

Overcoming the Problem with the Setting



- ▶ Prepare the group members well
- ▶ Add items to the group agreement

Additions to the group agreement

- ▶ To connect with both video and audio in a way that allows view all participants, unless other arrangements are made on occasion.
- ▶ To arrange for a quiet room with full privacy and no interruptions. This includes no phone calls, emails or texting during the entire session.
- ▶ To stay focused on the group interactions.

2. The Disembodied Group

- ▶ The main difficulty in online therapy is the absence of the body (actually body-to-body communication and regulation)
- ▶ It's difficult to create a holding environment without a body
- ▶ The gaze is also missing and group members cannot see that the leader or another member is looking at them
- ▶ Affect regulation through the somatic, physical and emotional presence of the leader and the members is gone

The Disembodied Group

(continued)

- ▶ We should remember that one part of our body is seen more clearly online: the face.
- ▶ We can see and identify facial expressions much better online than in-person because we see people close-up.
- ▶ If we train ourselves to be sensitive to facial expressions, we can get more information about the group members through their faces than in our office.

The Disembodied Group

(continued)

Can we “touch” one
another online?



Can we create intimacy online?



The interpersonal neurobiology and online therapy

The question of physical presence is even more relevant in the frame of reference of interpersonal neurobiology modern theories. These theories, by Alan Schore (2003), Daniel Siegel (1999), Louis Cozolino (2013) and others, emphasize the importance of mutual regulation based on physical presence.

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- these theorists claim that what works in therapy is not just the words but the mutual regulation of brain to brain, body to body. Sometimes these theories focus on right brain to right brain communication and sometimes on the peripheral nervous system

Bowlby's theory of attachment

- Bowlby's theory of attachment stands out, as almost every psychotherapeutic approach nowadays uses some of his conceptual approach.
- Proximity is the keyword in Bowlby's theory. Children seek closeness with a parent who can protect and take care of them.
- From here derives the assumption that the therapist should also be close in order to help the client repair the attachment ruptures.

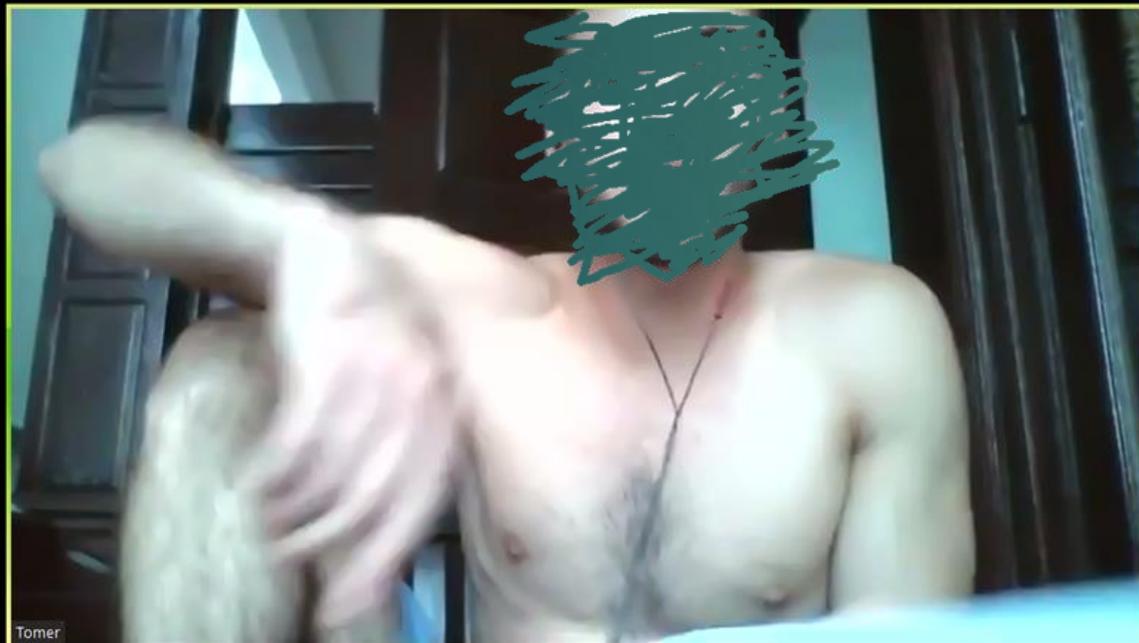
Does closeness require physical proximity ?

When Bowlby talked about proximity, did he mean “in the same location”?

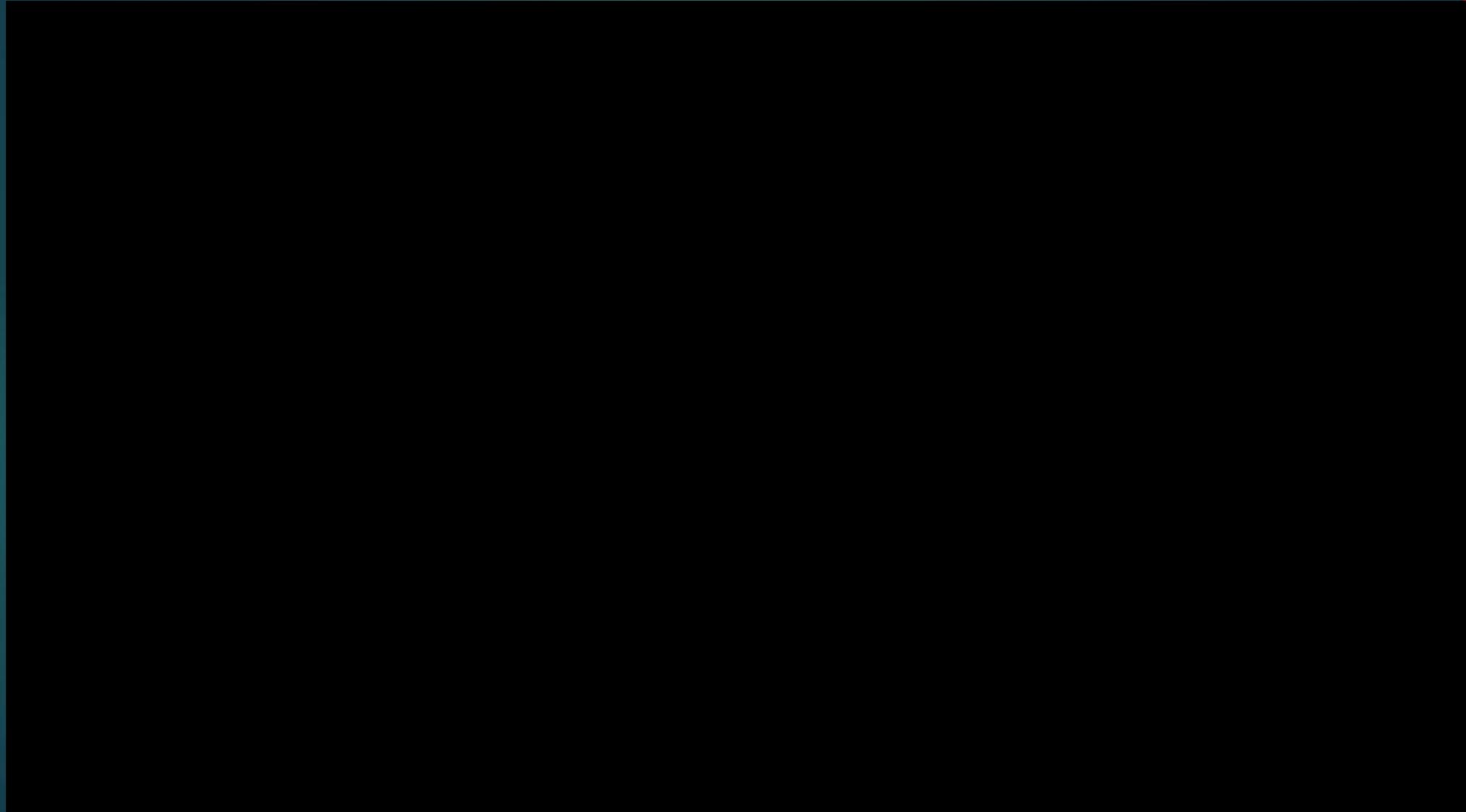
While interpretation-based theories did not place much emphasis on the element of physical closeness, in some of the attachment-based approaches this is element cannot be ignored, thus questioning the validity of remote treatment.

Can we think of caring for small children without physical proximity? While we do believe that remote therapy is possible and effective, we hardly believe that it is suitable for very young children

So how can we bring the body into online therapy?



An Interview with Lew Aron and Galit Atlas



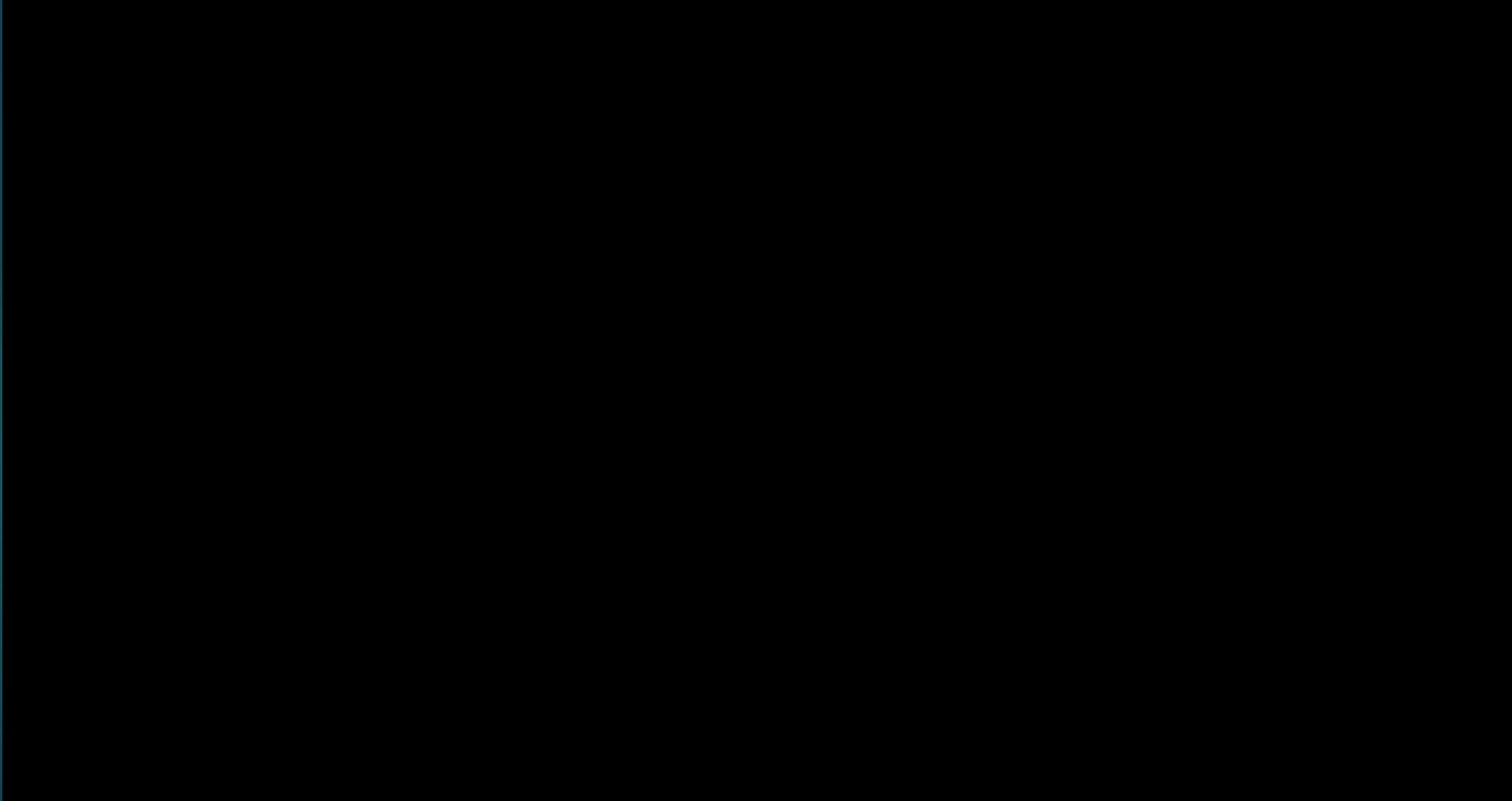


Ogden and Goldstein (2020), suggest being more active online by asking the group members to report their body sensations and requesting that they move in the room (distance themselves from the screen or get closer to it) according to the changing circumstances and needs.

3. The Group Analyst's Presence

- ▶ What is presence?
- ▶ Presence has been described as one of the most therapeutic gifts a therapist can offer a client (Geller & Greenberg, 2002).
- ▶ Therapeutic presence is defined as bringing one's whole self to the engagement with the client and being fully in the moment with and for the client, with little self-centered purpose or goal in mind (Craig, 1986).
- ▶ Therapist presence is understood as the ultimate state of moment-by-moment receptivity and deep relational contact.
- ▶ For many reasons, it is much more difficult to stay present online. There are too many distractions and the screen barrier can decrease and dilute the presence of the therapist.

An Interview with Molyn Leszcz



The group analyst's presence (continued)

- ▶ The leader should find new and creative ways of being present
- ▶ Reduce the screen barrier by more intensive use of the therapist's self
- ▶ Use self-disclosure and transparency: the difference between there-and-then and here-and-now kinds
- ▶ Focus on facial expressions of dissatisfaction and frustration and bring them into discussion
- ▶ Take responsibility for mistakes (difficult in authority oriented cultures)
- ▶ **Use of imagination** (examples)

In an online group using video conferencing, one of the group members, Sheila, requested feedback from the group, saying that she is usually satisfied with her life, happy and easy going, wondering whether she is denying something. Some group members said that they find it hard to believe that she is always content. Summarizing the responses, the group analyst suggested to Sheila that her limited range of emotions is perceived superficial to the group members. The leader noticed that some group members' facial expressions online seemed shocked or irritated (but not Sheila's). After some reflection, he got back to Sheila and said that he wanted to correct his previous intervention, because it might have been understood as if Sheila is superficial, which was not the therapist's intention. He corrected himself by telling Sheila that when she only expresses joy and never any sign of irritation, dissatisfaction or any negative emotions, it makes it difficult for him, the group analyst, to get closer to Sheila. She had a strong emotional reaction to this intervention and later on it became clear how much her parents did not allow for any emotional strong reaction, and never acknowledged that they had made mistakes.

4. Do not ignore the cat 😊

- ▶ We tend to ignore the “background” in online (group) therapy
- ▶ Boundary crossings/violations that therapists would not ignore in their office become transparent/invisible and ignored when it happens online (a cat walking in front of the camera)
- ▶ Pay attention to what is happening “in the background”, and recruit the group to work it through
- ▶ Failures in Internet communication should also be processed as having a dynamic impact (who is to blame?)
- ▶ Connecting from a car should be discouraged and interpreted

In an online group using video conferencing, one of the participants, Sima, that had missed the previous session, appeared on the screen sitting in the back seat of a car, probably a cab, using her iPhone to connect to the group. The group members wondered what happened to her that she had been absent last time, but nobody mentioned the fact that she is in a car with someone else driving it. After a while, when the group analyst saw that the group continues to ignore the situation, he wondered aloud whether he is the only one that noticed that Sima is on her iPhone in a car, and how do people feel about it.

One group member, Nora, said that she doesn't feel safe and she is worried about confidentiality, to which Sima replied that it is okay because she does not know the driver, so she feels free to talk about anything she wants. This response enraged some group members who felt that she does not consider **their** privacy. Another member, Fiona, was concerned that Sima will not be able to emotionally connect with the group while her attention would be on the road. Hella, on the other hand, expressed her sympathy with Sima, saying how glad she is that Sima did not want to miss this group session as well, and made the effort to connect despite her not being at home. Sima was touched by this empathic response and acknowledged that she wanted to eat the cake and have it all: drive to an important business meeting and still not miss the group. She asked the group what they think she should do. Nora said that she still feels unsafe and wanted Sima to leave the session and come back next time, connecting from home. David joined her, saying that Sima violated the rules and the agreement they all have made entering the group.

After a lengthy discussion, the group analyst decided that a decision should be made: He suggested that Sima leave the group session and welcomed her to join next session and discuss it. Sima became rageful, shouted that the group and its leader act like machines, in a nonhuman way, and that she doesn't want to be there anymore. She disconnected her iPhone and disappeared. The group continued to process their feelings for the rest of the session, shifting between people expressing anger at Sima and the group analyst (who should have intervened earlier, in their opinion), and between people fearing that they will be rejected if they deviated from some group norms. The group analyst encouraged them to express their feelings, saying how important it is to allow different opinions and attitudes, and that safety is about the freedom to discuss difficult issues no less than setting boundaries.

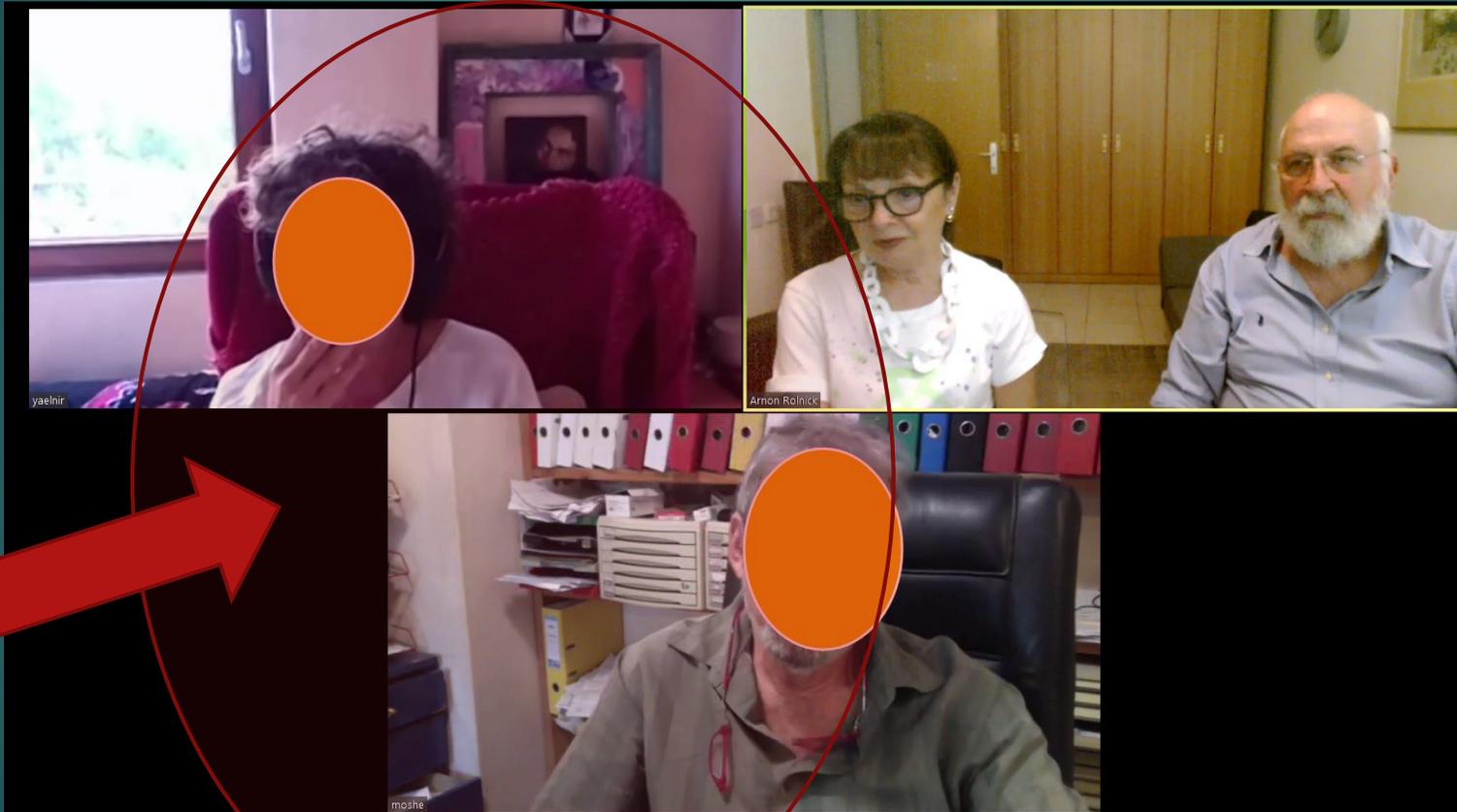
The next meeting Sima showed up as usual, in her home, to the relief of everyone (including the group analyst). After they expressed this relief and wanted to move forward, the group analyst suggested discussing the dramatic events from last meeting. Following some conversation, Sima thanked everyone for the previous meeting, saying that she thought a lot about what has happened and her strong emotional reaction. She brought memories of rejection by her family of origin and peers. Other members who had felt rejected through their life, joined her. These two meetings became a turning point for the group and increased the ability of the members to express differences and to feel safe in opening up.

Do not confuse Internet Barriers with Internal Barriers

- ▶ *Karin joined an online process group led by the author after participating in an intensive workshop he was conducting in a professional conference. In that workshop she was very impressed by the group analyst's skills and felt that he understood her deeply. She perceived him as giving her special attention and being very attuned to her. However, a few months after she had joined the weekly online group she felt very disappointed. She did not feel as special as she felt in the intensive f2f workshop and she thought that she does not draw the leader's attention as she expected. She said something about losing his attention in the group, but the topic was not explored much further.*
- ▶ *A few weeks later she wrote an email to the group analyst, letting him know that she considers leaving the group. She blamed it on the fact that it is an online group and that she cannot build the connection she is used to create in a group meeting in-person. She wrote that the online format did not work very well for her. She added that there is something about not being in the same physical space at the same time that presents a barrier to the group process for her.*

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- ▶ *The group analyst suggested that she will bring this issue for discussion in the group, sticking to the common practice of in-person groups that everything relevant to the group process that is discussed outside the group, should be brought back to the group, especially when someone considers termination. She agreed and in the next online group session she told the group that she does not think that the online format suits her. As usual with such announcements, people's reactions varied between expressing sorrow and sadness and between being irritated. They did not suggest exploring her motives further. Eventually, the group analyst asked whether it means that they agree with her that the online modality does not allow for "real" connection. This intervention helped the discussion to deepen, and one member suggested that perhaps there are other issues that block her ability to connect. The group leader reminded her how disappointed she was about not getting enough attention from him and wondered whether it was more meaningful than she had allowed herself to imagine or experience.*
 - ▶ *After the conversation began to move away from this dialogue between Karin and the leader, Nina said, "Karin, I can see that the connection between you and Haim is important to you right now, and I want you to have that. I want to do whatever I can to help you have it." Karin became tearful and was deeply touched by this sacrifice. She remembered that in her family of origin, her youngest sister always received her father's full attention and she painfully longed for him to pay attention for her as well. She was shocked that this group "sister" of her did not play the role she had expected. All the group members were touched by Nina's generosity. When the group leader asked Nina whether she can reflect on her motivation, Nina understood that Karin was her "sister," too, that in fact, at that point in time, Nina's father was battling the end stages of cancer, and Nina desperately wanted her own sister to receive the validation of her relationship with their father. Nina had the opportunity to realize the painful impact on Nina of Nina's sister's longing to be validated by their father.*

Sitting arrangement pros and cons



Two patients
Each in a
separate
computer

Most couples
are sitting
before the
computer does
not allow
direct
interaction

Making It More Real?



Most therapists and patients sit very near the computer



Is it better to sit in some distance from the camera?



The Importance of the Camera



The camera represent the head of the therapist



In Summary

What we discussed...

