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An Examination of the Gestalt Group Process Using the Online Group Environment

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Social media communications provides alternatives to healthcare by presenting a platform to the public, patients, and healthcare professionals as a way to communicate health issues that could improve health outcomes (Ramezanhani, Yadegarynia, Dorodgar & Arab-Mazar, 2019). These findings suggest that there is a need for studies regarding the psychological effects of taking part in social media platforms. This phenomenological study explored lived experience involving group member support received in the online environment and the opportunity that they were afforded to experiment with feedback to gain awareness of self via blogging. The conceptual framework was Beisser's paradoxical theory of change. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore potential benefits of using an interactive online environment (i.e., secured blog) for gestalt group members and facilitators to provide feedback, and support as a supplement to gestalt group sessions. Data were collected from 15 participants through 12 semi-structured interview questions. In-depth interviews involved a series of open-ended questions to gather details regarding participants' lived experiences in terms of online blog. The findings among both active and inactive participants of the blog was that they both used feedback that was presented by the facilitator of the group in the blog to enhance their therapeutic experiences. Another finding was the feeling of support for members of the blog. This research could fill a gap in understanding how secure online blogs could provide useful information to practitioners regarding mental benefits of support received.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Dr. Jared Scherz who mentored me and introduced me to Gestalt Therapy. He was an inticate part of me learning how to hone my therapeutic process to help others.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The Internet has enabled psychologists to deliver treatments that are as effective as in-office therapy sessions. Media psychology involves the study of ideas, social behavior, and effects of media communication (Guadagno, Jones, Kimbrough, & Mattu, 2016). Social media communications provides alternatives to health care by presenting a platform to the public, patients, and healthcare professionals as a way to communicate health issues that could improve health outcomes (Ramezanhani, Yadegarynia, Dorodgar & Arab-Mazar, 2019). There are mental health professionals that use social media as a forum to facilitate feedback, mediate support for their clients, and create discussion forums as an extension of therapy. Guadagno et al. (2016) suggested that there is a need for studies about the psychological effects of taking part in social media platforms. According to Fergie, Hunt, and Hilton (2016), limited research is available detailing accounts of how social media platforms are experienced by individuals who use them for mental health support.

To initiate social change in terms of how mental health care interventions are viewed, it is important to understand the process and how it benefits the clients. According to Novotney (2014), blogging is a beneficial form of communication which offers added psychological benefits such as reduced social anxiety and improved self-esteem. The understanding of the experience of an individual who uses online mental health platforms is important when developing resources for the online environment such as blogs and online group notes (Fergie, Hunt, & Hilton, 2016). Online-based mental health blogs may have the ability to address some unmet needs of mental health care

(Moock, 2014). Mental health group therapy with online group notes as a form of feedback and reinforcement of interventions may have beneficial effects. Studies associated with online-based mental health services, gestalt theory, and methodologies are reviewed in Chapter 2.

This chapter includes an introduction to the study and a description of the background of the study. This chapter, includes the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, and theoretical framework. Also discussed are the nature of the study and definitions of key terms. In this chapter, there are descriptions of assumptions, scope of delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, a summary of the literature, and a description of the existing gap in the literature.

Background of Study

The Internet includes a variety of blogs that focus on mental health issues. The use of the Internet can be beneficial because of its ability to facilitate the economical delivery of individually focused health promoting interventions (Powell et al., 2013). Gestalt group basic principles require group members to pay attention to experiences in session (Feder, 2007). By creating a secure blog, mental health providers who facilitate gestalt groups can provide tools for added interaction like online group notes. Online group notes of process-oriented groups that keep group members connected via the Internet 24 hours a day can provide support and feedback. Fosha (2004) said that it is important to follow and process emotions of emotionally affected individuals in an environment where they feel secure because it creates a significant means of therapeutic transformation. According to Sabar (2013), the gestalt phenomenological field is where

perceptions and in-the-moment lived experiences determine level of awareness of self and situational awareness to gain meaning. Chen, Kakkad, and Balzano (2008) recommended that facilitators of groups provide members with an awareness of how to give and receive focused feedback that is in the here-and-now.

This phenomenological study explored lived experiences which involve group member support received in the online environment and opportunities to experiment with feedback to gain awareness of self via blogging. The study provided useful information to practitioners regarding the mental benefits of support received. The research explored if social media in a controlled environment assists in terms of reinforcing skills learned in group therapy. The findings added to existing literature to understand beneficial and non-beneficial aspects of the online group experience. This research could fill a gap in terms of understanding how the Internet can provide a platform for the delivery of information and interventions to help people modify lifestyle risk factors and, inform and empower individuals to better manage their health. No peer-reviewed articles were found that address supplemental online blog services in the form of group notes for a gestalt process-oriented group.

Problem Statement

The research problem was the lack of studies that addressed how the gestalt group process and the online group environment through means of blogging affected individuals. There are mental health professionals that use social media as a forum to facilitate feedback, mediate support for their clients, and create discussion forums as an extension of therapy. Media psychology is the study of ideas, social behavior, and the

effects of media communication (Guadagno et al., 2016). Guadagno et al. (2016) suggested that there is a need for studies about the psychological effects of taking part in social media platforms. According to Fergie, Hunt, and Hilton (2016), limited research is available detailing accounts of how social media platforms are experienced by individuals who use them for mental health support.

The internet hosts a variety of blogs that focus on mental health issues. The use of the internet can be beneficial because of its ability to facilitate the economical delivery of individually focused health promoting interventions (Powell et al., 2013). According to Sabar (2013), the gestalt phenomenological field is where perceptions and in-the-moment experiences determine the level of awareness of self and situational awareness to gain meaning. Chen, Kakkad, and Balzano (2008) recommended that facilitators of groups provide members with an awareness of how to give, and receive focused feedback that is in the here-and-now. Gestalt group basic principles require the members to pay attention to lived experiences in session (Feder, 2007). By creating a secure blog, mental health providers who facilitate gestalt groups can provide tools for added interaction like online group notes. Online group notes of a process-oriented group that keeps group members connected via the internet 24 hours a day can provide support and feedback to stay in the moment. Also, Fosha (2004) inferred that it is important to follow and process emotions of an emotionally affected individual in an environment where the individual feels secure because it creates a significant means of therapeutic transformation.

This phenomenological study will explore lived experiences involving group member support received in the online environment and opportunities to experiment with

feedback to gain awareness of self via blogging. According to Munoz et al. (2018), there are several web-based and mobile health applications used as digital interventions available world-wide, but many web-based interventions are not tested to determine their credibility. This research could fill a gap in understanding how secure online blogs could provide useful information to practitioners regarding the mental benefits of support received. Therefore, the study explored these potential impacts, including if social media in a controlled environment assists in reinforcing skills learned in group therapy. The findings will add to existing literature to understand beneficial and non-beneficial aspects of the online group experience. No peer-reviewed articles have been found that address supplemental online blog services in the form of group notes for a gestalt process oriented group.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore potential benefits of using an interactive online environment (i.e., secured blog) for gestalt group members and facilitators to provide feedback, and support as a supplement to gestalt group sessions. This study used a qualitative approach to interpret a phenomenological analysis of lived experiences of group members who had access to group notes through online secure social networks. Also, face-to-face interviews along with software to aid in associating themes with information provided in the interviews were used to gain an understanding of shared lived experiences. One of the facets of gestalt therapy is a phenomenological method of awareness. The qualitative method was used to address overlapping phenomena to explore group configurations and augment the understanding

of the online social network experience. This exploration included interviews with gestalt group members in conjunction with existing data on gestalt group methods and examples of online group notes.

Research Questions

By exploring extensive literature on the subject of gestalt group therapy, blogging, and Internet social networking, the aim was to investigate how participation in the online group note environment significantly aided in the psychological well-being associated with social interaction and awareness. No peer-reviewed articles had a central focus on participation in online group feedback. Four initial research questions were developed to help explore the lived experiences of the participants in the study. The four research questions were used to develop 12 interview questions (see Appendix A).

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of individuals who participate in gestalt group therapy with the added benefit of online group notes?

RQ2: In what way do group members experience unfinished dialogue from group sessions via online group notes and blogs?

RQ3: Do people who participate in gestalt process groups with the added benefit of online group notes perceive increased levels of psychological wellbeing over time?

RQ4: Are online group note lived experiences beneficial or nonbeneficial in terms of raising awareness of self and the environment?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

A theoretical framework and conceptual framework are sometimes thought to be the same, but they are not (Grant, Grant. & Osanloo, 2014). A theoretical framework as

defined by Eisenhart is a formal theory that is created from explanations of phenomena and relationships that serves as a structured guide for research (Eisenhart, 1991). A conceptual framework focuses on the researcher's comprehension of the best way to explore the research problem, which includes the direction of the research, and the relationship of the variables involved in the study (Grant, Grant, & Osanloo, 2014). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a conceptual framework is a system of concepts, assumptions, and beliefs guide that back the research plan.

The theoretical and conceptual framework for this study is the paradoxical theory of change which is based on the work of Perls who formally never named the theory, but it encompasses his work in his gestalt technique practice (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951). The paradoxical theory of change was named by Beisser which sustains the idea that the focus of gestalt theory one of which is the paradoxical theory of change is not to change who a person is, but for the person to embrace all aspects of the experience, by expanding awareness of the occurrence, and becoming more engaged in the encounter (Beisser, 1970). Goals met are not measured, but how it adds to an individual's understanding of self, and the environment (Yontef & Schulz, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was the paradoxical theory of change. The theory relates to phenomenology and the research questions because the theory examines how people embrace all aspects of the experience, by expanding awareness of the occurrence and becoming more engaged in the encounter (Beisser, 1970). There are four research questions. The first research question asked participants to describe their

lived experience of interacting online with group notes. This research question attempted to gain awareness of their feelings of the experience. The second research question asked participants how they experienced unfinished dialogue from group sessions via online group notes and blog. This research question attempted to identify how the participant transitioned from a group setting to an online blog setting to express their feelings. The third research question asked if people who participated in the gestalt process group with the added benefit of online group notes perceived increased levels of psychological well-being over time. This research question attempted to identify how aware the participants were of the changes that may have happened in their lived experience on the blog. The fourth research question asked if the online group note lived experience was beneficial or non-beneficial in raising awareness of self and the environment. This research question attempted to identify how aware participants were of the benefits if any to interacting in the online environment.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework paradoxical theory of change was on the interactivity between the lived experiences of gestalt group members and online blogging interactions as a supplement to therapy. The elements of the experimental phenomenological attitude comprised of particular attentiveness to the present experience and were included throughout the research design to ensure the exploration of lived experiences. The gestalt therapy concept involved individual awareness to encourage personal growth and development of potential, to become whole (Perls et al., 1951).When an individual becomes whole, he or she gains awareness by noticing how he or she is living. They

explore how they create fixed patterns that leave them feeling dissatisfied, uncomfortable, or ill at ease. Gestalt theory encourages a nonjudgmental awareness of an individual's present experience from moment to moment (Perls et al., 1951). Group members are asked to notice what they are experiencing (perceptions, sensations, feelings) and notice how they behave (express and communicate) in the present which creates an opportunity to explore changes in their behavior, and attitudes (Yontef, & Schulz, 2016).

Group members with experience regarding the interactive online group environment were used to collect data for this topic. The aim was to explore experiences beyond face-to-face group interactions. Online experiences involving group member interactions were explored to understand the social and mental health implications of the process. Qualitative studies that have a phenomenological emphasis are used to analyze personal accounts to extract the meaning of experiences (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). Qualitative research provides unhampered investigations that can assist researchers to discern unexpected findings or means for further investigation (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). The paradoxical theory of change is further explained in Chapter 2.

Nature of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to interpret a phenomenological analysis involving lived experiences of gestalt group members who have access to group notes through online secure social networks. The research data was collected from 15 gestalt group members who participated in the online group notes environment. The sample size was chosen to ensure that it was large enough to get a purposeful sampling yet small

enough to contain the thematic analysis (Turner-Bowker et al., 2018). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) conducted a study on data set that included 12 interviews and found that saturation was achieved.

Semi-structured open-ended questions were utilized. Data was collected anonymously to protect subjects' confidentiality and identity. Two methods of collecting data were used during the interview process. Face-to-face interviews and Skype using EVAER software were used with gestalt group members who participated in the online group note environment to understand how the online experience affected their treatment goals. In-depth interviews through face-to-face and Skype encounters were done to reduce interpretation errors in communication. Sample interviews focused on the experience of the sample population to determine the level of benefit of the online environment in gaining an understanding of awareness of feelings, understanding of reactions and thoughts to resolve personal issues. The interviews were digitally recorded. The data from the digital recordings were transcribed. NVivo software was used to assist in collecting and organizing themes from interviews of the sample population.

By using the qualitative approach the *how* and *why* questions generated meanings that were used in the interpretation of the phenomenological analysis of the lived experience of group members who had access to group notes through online secure social networks. The phenomenological approach explored descriptions to gain an in-depth interpretation (Davidsen, 2013). The qualitative methods focused on a knowledge-based exploration (Davidsen, 2013). The qualitative method has been used by psychologists for many years to gain an understanding of human behavior (Heglar & Cuevas, 2017). For

these reasons, a qualitative approach instead of the quantitative approach was used. Additional information about data collection and analysis is provided in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Awareness: A form of experience that is in touch with one's own existence, of *what is* (Yontef*, 1999)*.

Blogs: A blog is defined as a tool used on the internet to express ideas, feelings, views, and to help track events in the lives of people (Siles, 2011).

Capacity of Self-Awareness: Explores the possibility that as people become more in tune with self, they can live the lives that they desire (Corey, 2013).

Dynamic: The unconscious self-distribution of the part to the whole (Sabar, 2013).

Existential phenomenology: Existential phenomenology relates to oneness versus connection by focusing on the individual's daily experiences (Finlay, 2015).

Gestalt: Gestalt is a German word, which when translated into English means the exploration of shape and form. When referring to people, gestalt refers to the patterns that form as people move through life, how these patterns relate to the environment, and how the patterns shape experiences as people move from one experience to the next (Mann, 2010).

Isomorphism and Holism: Isomorphism and Holism is the connection between a person's emotions and how it has an effect on a person's mind and the body (Sabar, 2013).

Micro-blogging: Micro-blogging allows people to use their mobile devices, the personal pages, instant messaging service to send short messages (Lai, & Yang, 2015).

*Phenomenology***:** Phenomenology explores descriptions to gain an in-depth interpretation (Davidsen, 2013).

Social media: Social media which is synonymous with social networking sites is defined as forms of electronic communication that users create online communities.

Assumptions

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of the online gestalt group members. The data was collected from the gestalt group members who were part of the online group experience. One assumption was that volunteers would participate in this study from the online gestalt groups. A second assumption was that the participants in the study would give honest and detailed information about their online group experience. The third assumption was that the information about the experiences of the participants would benefit from this study. The fourth assumption was that the participants in the study would be willing and able to respond to the research questions. Another assumption was that the participants would openly share information about the relationships and experiences that they share with other group members online. The assumptions made were important in the context of this study because this qualitative phenomenological study related to how individuals shared their experiences in an online environment.

Scope and Delimitations

This section includes an overview of the scope and the delimitations of the study. The aim of this study was to explore how online supplemental services as an extension of group sessions affected gestalt group members. The study focused on the possibility of the benefit of using the online experience to benefit clients and mental health professionals deliver needed services. The theoretical and conceptual framework for this study is the paradoxical theory of change which was named by Beisser which sustains the idea that the focus of gestalt theory one of which is the paradoxical theory of change is not to change who a person is, but for the person to embrace all aspects of the experience, by expanding awareness of the occurrence, and becoming more engaged in the encounter (Beisser, 1970). There are no studies that have a central focus on online group feedback. There is a gap in the literature where no studies have involved gestalt online group feedback. The scope of the study included gestalt group members who had experienced the online group environment. The study included interviews with 15 male and female gestalt group members, males, and females ages range from 30 to 64 years of age. The sample size was chosen to ensure that it was large enough to get a purposeful sampling yet small enough to contain the thematic analysis (Turner-Bower et al., 2018).

The scope of this qualitative phenomenological study examined the lived experience of group members who had access to group notes through online secure social networks. This study provides information on the qualitative method and design that was used to help understand the participant's experiences. The qualitative method addresses

the overlapping phenomena to explore group configurations and to augment the understanding of the online social network experience.

The delimitations were chosen purposefully to restrict the population to individuals with experience in the gestalt online group. The participants in the study were selected with the use of purposeful random sampling which was a deliberate way of choosing the sample (Yin, 2011). The delimitations of sample size and participation type were chosen in order to examine the lived experiences in this phenomenological study. According to Yin (2011), this type of sample selection is done to get the optimal amount of relevant data. This method of sampling was chosen to ensure that the participants meet the criteria for the study. Because the intent of the study was to focus on gestalt group member with online group note experience, the study limited all other possible participants of other mental health group therapy participants, and therefore they were excluded. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is a form of external validity which describes how the phenomenon or findings of the study can be applied or useful to theory, practice, or subsequent research. The transferability in this study was limited due to the sample size and focus on Gestalt group member with online group note experience. Transferability however is possible if further studies are similar and the results of the research are similar.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study was that there are no peer-reviewed articles or studies associated with the specific subject matter. This lack of peer-reviewed articles limits the guidelines and references that could be used to compare and contrast finding.

The benefit of the limitation is that the lack of prior studies creates an opportunity for other researchers to expand on the information within this study with new findings. The second limitation could be sample size in this qualitative study which is smaller in relation to a quantitative study where the sample size would be larger. The benefit of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of the participants which could lead to a more in-depth understanding of their experiences. According to Davidsen (2013), the phenomenological approach explores descriptions to gain an in-depth interpretation. The qualitative methods focus on a knowledge-based exploration (Davidsen, 2013). There is also a potential problem with the use of the phenomenological qualitative design which relies on the participants telling their story of their lived experience. I had to rely on the participants' memory and some of the participants had not been in the group setting with the supplemental online blog for over a year. This required the participants to remember how they felt about their interaction in the past. The participants appeared to be able to remember how they felt about their involvement and recall that information. The implication of this limitation was my inability to confirm the accuracy of the statements made by the participants. The use of open-ended questions allowed the participants to tell their stories and change or elaborate on their ideas.

To eliminate bias in the study, interviews were transcribed. The data was collected through digital recording and the data was analyzed. The interviews were transcribed using the dragon naturally speaking software program and NVivo software. The focus of the responses were compared to the responses of the participants which

identified any similarities, differences or patterns. After the transcription was complete, a copy was forwarded to the participant for review and verification. This process ensured that the personal bias of the interviewer was eliminated.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research was to provide information to mental health professionals about the use of social media as a forum to facilitate feedback, mediate support for their clients, and create discussion forums as an extension of therapy. As stated in the introduction of this chapter Guadagno et al. (2016) suggested that there is a need for studies about the psychological effects of taking part in social media platforms. There was limited research available detailing accounts of how social media platforms were experienced by individuals in group therapy who use them for mental health support (Fergie, Hunt, and Hilton, 2016). This study could provide information to mental health professionals and the public about options when looking for a healthcare provider. Therefore researching in this area can provide healthcare providers with insight into the delivery of interventions that use online forums and improve understanding of this practice.

This study could initiate positive social change in how online mental health care interventions are viewed which could provide individuals with additional options to look for when considering the type of mental health provider services that they seek for support. This study results could provide an understanding of how social support in a private blog can benefit gestalt group members outside of group sessions. The benefit of

self-expression in the form of writing; blogging is a beneficial form of communication which offers added psychological benefits such as reduced social anxiety and improved self-esteem (Novotney, 2014). Mental health group therapy with added benefits of online group notes as a form of feedback and reinforcement of interventions may have beneficial effects.

Summary

There are commonalities among most industrial countries and emerging economies where mental disorders are prevalent. There are effective treatments such as pharmacotherapy, psychological interventions, and self-help programs, yet still, there is a treatment gap in mental health care that remains. Most of the interventions studied by Lal and Adair, (2014) focused on prevention, mental health promotion or interventions, and a point of the continuum of care, and employed a single format; several used several types of approaches. For instance, Tillfors and colleagues researched if an Internet-delivered self-help intervention in additions to minimal e-mail contact was as beneficial as adding in-person group sessions to the internet intervention. The findings resulted in similar outcomes (Lal& Adair, 2014).

Gestalt therapy researchers acknowledge the need for evidence-based studies to verify that gestalt therapy provides effective forms of psychotherapy (Brownell, 2014; Burley, 2014). One option that has the possibility of improving mental health care services is to utilize the internet. The internet has the potential to provide online-based mental health services which can fill an unmet gap (Moock, 2014). This research could fill a gap in understanding how the Internet can provide a platform for the delivery of

information and interventions to help people modify lifestyle risk factors, inform, and empower individuals so that they are better able to manage their health. Through this exploration the aim was to address the question of how the Internet is experienced, how does blogging affect gestalt members, and what meaning it provides to gestalt group members? Relatively little qualitative literature exists regarding online group notes as a supplement to gestalt group therapy.

In summary, this study could help bridge the gap, and allow group members to voice their experience of receiving feedback online within a therapeutic setting. It could help to raise awareness about how group members are interacting with each other. This study could provide information on how others perceive themselves, as a means of supporting pro-social human behaviors. This chapter included the background of the study, the problem statements, and the purpose of study, research questions, theoretical framework, nature of study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive discussion of current literature related to the study. Chapter 2 consists of an introduction, literature search strategy, conceptual and theoretical foundation, phenomenology, literature review related to key concepts, capacity of self-awareness, freedom and responsibility, identity and relationship, searching for meaning, anxiety as a part of life, death and non-being, contact and awareness, the gestalt group process, what is social media, social media and mental healthcare, benefits of internet mental health delivery, problematic social media use, social networking, social support and blogging, social networking and micro-blogging, and the chapter summary.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to establish the need for research into the online group environment as a platform for the enhancement of the gestalt group process and also to review the available literature. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the potential benefit of using an interactive online environment (i.e., secured blog) for gestalt group members and facilitators to provide feedback and support as a supplement to gestalt group session. It further established the need for additional research into online mental health therapeutic practices. Media psychology is the study of ideas, social behavior, and the effects of media communication (Guadagno, Jones, Kimbrough, & Mattu, 2016).

This literature review revealed that there was no research that addressed supplemental online blog services in the form of group notes for a gestalt process-oriented group. Due to this gap in the literature Beisser's (1970) paradoxical theory of change which is the foundation of gestalt theory was chosen to organize the framework of this study. This chapter includes an introduction, a literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, a literature review of key concepts, and summary. The chapter reviews research on the gestalt group process and social media. The review is meant to provide background, demonstrate knowledge, and update the reader on mental health therapeutic practices in the online environment. The review is meant to provide information on gestalt therapy interventions. Gestalt therapy along with treatment philosophy was explored. Information about social media and mental health promoting interventions are included in the chapter as well.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review was conducted using the Walden University online library and Google Scholar. The Walden University Library databases PsycINFO, PsycArticles, SocIndex, and SAGE Journals were used to retrieve articles. Additional articles were retrieved in the literature search through Google Scholar using the combined terms: gestalt, group therapy, media psychology, social media, and online group notes. None of the literature specifically referred to the gestalt group process and the use of an online group environment. Therefore, the content of this review is limited to gestalt therapy, the impact that social media has on individuals, and the effect of online mental health therapy.

Conceptual and Theoretical Foundation

The paradoxical theory of change was named by Beisser which is the foundation of present gestalt theory which theorizes that the goal is not to change who a person is, but for the person to embrace all aspects of the experience, by expanding awareness of the occurrence, and becoming more engaged in the encounter (Beisser, 1970). To further understand this theory it is important to understand the gestalt theory. The word gestalt is a German word, which when translated into English means pattern, form, shape or configuration. The word gestalt refers to a person's appearance, the complete person, and the location of their energy. In this case, the translation of the word gestalt into English does not convey its full meaning, but a close representation of its meaning (Mann, 2010). The two key components of gestalt theory are phenomenology and existential philosophy. In art, gestalt refers to the exploration of shape and form. When referring to people,

gestalt refers to the patterns that form as people move through life, how these patterns relate to the environment, and how the patterns shape experiences as people move from one experience to the next (Mann, 2010).

An inaccurate description of gestalt theory is the whole is more than the sum of its parts. A more accurate translation is, "The whole is something else than the sum of its parts" (Wagemans, Feldman, Gepshtein, Kimchi, Pomerantz, van der Helm, & van Leeuwen, 2012, p. 1219). When perceived the whole has an independent existence its separate reality that is different than the parts that make up the whole. The gestalt-theoretical foundation integrated many philosophies, theories, and approaches (Finlay, 2015). Mann (2010) referred to Yontef (1999) for a description of the gestalt principles which comprise of existential phenomenology, field theory, and dialogic existentialism.

Phenomenology

According to Yontef (2002), phenomenology is the study of immediate perception and description of things as experienced. Phenomenology focuses more on *what* and *how* than the *why*. The goal of the focus is to increase awareness and reduce bias opinion about the validity of thought (Yontef, 2002). Gestalt theory highlights awareness of the here-and-now and non-attachment. Gestalt theory focuses on the present rather than the past; while this is not to say that the past does not affect the present. The past can affect how people relate to the present. Therefore, acknowledgment of how the past events trigger people to feel, think, and react is believed to bring about a deeper awareness that eventually effects personal change because those triggers may not be beneficial in the present.

There are nine gestalt qualities within gestalt theory that assist in the understanding of phenomenology. These qualities are transposability, wholeness, form of organization, principles of pragnanz, tertiary qualities, isomorphism and holism, phenomenology, and the field theory (Sabar, 2013).

Transposability refers to the focus on a person's patterns of thought, feelings, and behavior as they deal with problems and fulfillment of needs (Sabar, 2013). The focus is on awareness of what the person is experiencing, sensations, feelings, thoughts, and situations, related to the environment and to need. It is congruent with a person's ability to form a need and then become aware of how to meet the need for action. The quality involved consists of making contact with others or something. It is the ability to regulate personal boundaries by the acceptance or rejection of ideas or things within a person's environment. The concept is that when a person allows their needs to be met, then they let go of the need, feel satisfied, and are at peace. Therapy is a tool that helps to explore patterns of behavior to identify patterns that result in a lack of movement.

Wholeness refers to the concept that the whole is something else than the sum of its parts. The focus is on the relationship between the parts that create the whole (Sabar, 2013). It is when people actively use awareness to create beneficial contact with past experiences, thoughts, emotions, body language, behaviors, and memories. The person moves in the direction of integration and wholeness without being held back by the past.

Form of organization refers to structure, figure/ground, dynamics, and level of organization (Sabar, 2013). Structure is the alignment of the parts and the whole, as well as how if a change in the part changes the whole. An example would be an expression of

emotion that would cause a physical reaction which would be apparent in body language. The figure is a person's immediate perception of importance. The ground is the place of awareness from where the figure arises. The ground can be mood, thought, culture, social interactions, or experience. Dynamic refers to the unconscious self-distribution of the part to the whole. We are all born with the built-in drive and potential to form our own nature and talents. A person can realize their potential and be their authentic self with an adequate environment. The level of organization involves the adjustments that people make to overcome obstacles that occur in their lives.

The principles of pragnanz are based on the word pragnanz. Pragnanz is a German word that means clarity, conciseness, and simplicity (Sabar, 2013). Pragnanz or good gestalt is the growth of the capacity to perceive, think, create, and act in the clearest, beneficial, integrative, and balanced way. Tertiary qualities are the ability to use intuitive awareness and recognition of body language (Sabar, 2013). Closure or completion is the tendency towards the closure of unfinished business (Sabar, 2013). There is tension in a person when there is unfinished business which has been stimulated by environmental demands. This tension needs a release for satisfaction to be achieved. If there is no resolution of the tension, the tension will continue. Isomorphism is a holistic aspect of the mind-body experience. Isomorphism is the connection between a person's emotions and how that connection impacts a person's mind and body (Sabar, 2013). An example would be when a person is happy there is a decrease in the rate and intensity of the neural activity of the brain which results in smiling or laughter. In gestalt, attention to body

processes, body language, and body awareness is a holistic approach to the mind-body experience (Sabar, 2013).

Phenomenology is the study of things as they appear to people in their subjective experience. Phenomenology is a part of awareness and part of the exploration of what is not immediately known to a person (Sabar, 2013). There are three methods in the phenomenological investigation. The first method is epoche which is closing off personal biases, prejudices, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and judgment to open up to another's experience. The second is the rule of description which requires a person to describe what they are feeling and not to explain it. The third is the rule of horizontalization, which involves giving equal weight to all description.

Finally, Lewin's field theory is the way people understand and review the multiple factors of casual relationships and come to the determination that changes in one part of the field will affect all aspects of the field (Sabar, 2013).According to Yontef (2002), a further explanation is that events are functions that work independently to create relationships that affect the whole while the whole affects the functions. The field is the context, situation, and environment of an individual. Individuals are a part of the field as opposed to being in the field. Field theory views people as interdependent instead of self-sufficient. Awareness and spirituality are connected and gained by making contact through dialogue with others in the environmental field as opposed to seeking awareness from within and separating from the environmental field which blocks contact. Contact among people is necessary for growth towards obtaining wholeness (Yontef, 1998).Field theory revolves around the interactions of people with their circumstances.

There are three aspects of the field. The first is the phenomenological field which is the exploration of a person's experience through the interpretation and meaning of that experience. The second is the environmental field which is, the contact made with other people. This field includes the boundaries for beneficial exchanges to happen between them while maintaining firm enough boundaries to allow for autonomy.

The third is the dialogic therapeutic relationship which uses the I-Thou philosophy introduced by Martin Buber to allow for the creation of a genuine dialogue between two people (Sabar, 2013). There are two primary words I-Thou or the I-You and I-It which can be replaced with he or she. These two primary words always refer to the relationship of experience and existence. The I-It is the chain of relationship experiences to things (self, people, environment, car, and so on). The I-It is a detached way of relating to others. The I-It relates to the egoistic way that people often address each other. This means the preoccupation with self and desire to get what they want though the manipulation of others. The I-It occurs when people interact with others from what they know about them from the past or from their own past patterns of interaction. The I-Thou is an unbounded relationship of consciousness of nature, people, and spiritual beings (Buber, 1970). The I-Thou is open, present, genuine and direct with a person instead of being partially engaged. The I Thou happens in the present instead of in the past. A person must choose to enter into the I-Thou experience. The I-Thou encounter takes will power to sustain because the person is unguarded eventually the I-Thou will be I-It (Buber, 1970). In the spoken I-Thou moments people give and accept the Thou. The I-Thou dialogue requires an individual to identify and express their feelings using the first

person singular pronoun I which refers to the speaker. For example speaker I feel my chest tightening because I am afraid to express my feelings. The respondent I appreciate you sharing your fears I often feel the same. The aim of the I-Thou dialogue is to stay in continued awareness (Buber, 1970).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Existential psychology or existentialism is a way of thinking and being which is a philosophy of freedom and responsibility. Existentialism integrates with other therapies which include gestalt, and psychoanalysis (Corey, 2013).The existential theory is based on existential phenomenology which focuses on the individual's daily experiences (Finlay, 2015). It is an examination of what it means to be human through focusing on the human experience. For example, the examination of the human experience might explore emotions or psychopathologies of loneliness, separation, speech, silence, and so on. Existentialism helps people explore who they are as a person and who they want to become. The goal is to find a balance which recognizes a person's limits to understand what is possible. The belief is that people who are continually growing can change. To make sense of the changes in the world and a person's life it is necessary for people to adapt and grow.

There are six key themes that assist in the understanding of the existential therapy. These themes are the capacity of awareness, freedom of responsibility, identity and relationships, searching for meaning, anxiety as a part of life, death and nonbeing (Corey, 2013).

Capacity of Self-Awareness

The capacity of self-awareness explores the possibility that as a person, he or she can live as desired (Corey, 2013). Self-awareness is the ability to discover oneself, to understand the importance and meaning of one's existence by reflection and understanding (Reber, 1995). It is the ability to make choices, be responsible for one's actions, and acknowledge responsibility for those actions (Reber, 1995). When a person's awareness has expanded the opportunity to open up to new perspectives and alternatives becomes available. Through self-awareness, people gain an understanding of what motivates them. With self-awareness comes the ability to accept human limitations and still feel good about oneself, because there is an understanding that there is no need to be perfect (Corey, 2013).

Self-awareness allows people to expand and restrict consciousness. When a person restricts their consciousness, they limit their ability to view different perspectives (Corey, 2013). For example, the challenge of self-awareness is the discomfort of being confronted with the unknown or feelings that cause fear or pain. This restriction limits their awareness of self and their environment and limits their ability to change. When one's capacity for self-awareness has expanded there is an increased ability to change, grow, and become more aware of available choices (Corey, 2013).

Freedom and Responsibility

Freedom and responsibility refer to the freedom that people have to make choices and the responsibilities that come with those choices be they good or bad (Yalom, 1989). People can reflect on their experiences and choose how to act (Yalom, 1989). Reflection

may enable people to move towards making a change which helps them become who they want to be. People have the option of moving towards authenticity by exploring how they live their lives to increase consciousness (Corey, 2013). According to Sartre (2015), the consequence of living free is the responsibility of that freedom because man is responsible for himself and for the world in which he lives. Responsibility is not acceptance it is a requirement of the consequences of freedom (Sartre, 2015).

People also have the option of moving towards inauthenticity by not exploring their consciousness and who they are. An example would be I am who I am and cannot change. This mode of existence lies in the rejection of awareness of personal responsibility and the assumption that existence is controlled by something other than self (Corey, 2013).

Identity and Relationships

Identity and relationships or also referred to as existential isolation is based on how people define themselves and their relationships with others. The human experience is unique and can be lonely which is why people attempt to make contact with other to avoid the fear of isolation (Corey, 2013). A part of the human condition is that we are prone to feelings of loneliness, meaninglessness, emptiness, and isolation. A person will never truly know what another person feels or thinks even if it is shared. According to Corey (2013), it is important to learn how to listen to ourselves before we can establish a meaningful relationship with others. People often establish their identity from those they are around. This contact can result in living an inauthentic life because of the lack of exploration of who they are as a person. It is important to be comfortable standing alone

in whom we are before we can share ourselves with others. By living authentically, people are aware of whom they are, and that they are alone in the world while having the ability to have shared experiences with others.

Searching for Meaning

Searching for meaning explores ways in which human beings can find meaning in their lives. According to Frankl (2006), the person who has a reason or a *why* to live for will be able to withstand almost any *how*. All human beings want a sense of significance and purpose in life (Corey, 2013). According to Frankl (2006), there are three specific ways in which to find meaning. One way is by doing or working towards something because people need goals, values, or ideas. The meaning of life is a perception that is subjective to each person's goals, values or ideas that may be different (Frankl, 2006). People work on discarding values and substituting them so they can create their own values. When people are not able to create new values or morals, it can cause discomfort (Corey, 2013). Without something to work towards people might experience depression or lack of meaning in life (Frankl, 2006).

People can find meaning through experiences or encounters with someone or something (Frankl, 2006). People regularly identify themselves by the people they interact with to provide them with meaning (Corey, 2013). Similar interest, ideas, and goals can create a sense of community and provide people with meaning. According to (Frankl, 2006), the highest goal a person can aspire towards is love. Love can provide a person with inner peace and strength to withstand difficult challenges and overcome obstacles. The final way is how people deal with unavoidable suffering. People cannot

avoid suffering it is a part of life, but they can choose how they cope with it to find meaning in it, and progress. According to Frankl (2006), when people use what they know about themselves and the world they can cope better with suffering. When people are not able to change their situation they are challenged to change themselves (Frankl, 2006).

Anxiety as a Part of Life

Anxiety as a part of life in the existential sense (Yalom, 1980) refers to the anxiety that people feel as they try to survive, sustain, and establish themselves in the world. Within the existential theory, anxiety comes from the focus of survival and maintenance of self (Corey, 2013). According to Popovic (2002), existential anxiety is the feeling of anguish that may present itself from thoughts of important questions about life for example, the *who* and the *why* in a person's life. For example, who do I want to be and why I do what I do? These are questions that people as themselves when they are searching for meaning and direction in their lives. According to existentialists, anxiety that comes from the focus of survival and maintenance is a normal part of life. According to Yalom (1980), existential anxiety is believed to be unavoidable because it is the result of life experiences with success, death, freedom, existential isolation, and meaninglessness.

According to Corey (2013), in existential theory there are two types of anxiety. There is existential anxiety also referred to as normal and neurotic anxiety (Popovic, 2002). Normal anxiety is a response that is suitable is a particular situation (Corey, 2013). For example, if someone gets a flat tire, they would get out of the car and change the tire

or call for roadside assistance. The person might be a little anxious about the discomfort of the inconvenience of the flat tire. Normal anxiety does not need to be held in it can be the catalysis for potential growth (Corey, 2013). Neurotic anxiety is a reaction that is not suitable for a situation. It is an over-reaction that can come from the fear that can immobilize a person. For example, if a person gets a flat tire and he locks himself in the car then calls his therapist and cries and screams. Neurotic anxiety is the result of the fear, not confronting what is not comfortable; it is a lack of awareness. Normal anxiety is healthy and people cannot survive without it because it is a part of the struggle that we face in life (Popovic, 2002). When a person faces their anxiety is helps them grow, gain self-awareness, and create meaning (Corey, 2013).

Death and Non-Being

Finally, death and non-being refers to death as being a normal part of life (Corey, 2013). When a person accepts death, it can provide perspectives on life. When a person accepts that death is inevitable, it can become a motivation to live to the fullest because they understand that they have a limited amount of time to fulfill their desires and goals (Novack, 2010). By accepting mortality people can become less guarded from the pain and fear that the idea of death presents to them and take responsibility for those fears, and develop more meaningful lives (Corey, 2013).

Contact and Awareness

The relation of contact and awareness in the gestalt process is an important aspect of the phenomenology (Yontef, 2016). Contact in gestalt therapy is the focus on the sensations from the body to process the responses in the environment. Awareness is the

understanding of the contact that is occurring between the person and the environment.

Awareness is a holistic process that encompasses the use of sensory, emotion and thought

to collect and develop information to be used while interacting with one's environment.

In the field problems and solutions are part of the field. According to this theory, since

people are part of the field, they can determine what happens and are responsible for the

outcomes. An important factor in awareness and contact is the responsibility for

decisions, and the understanding of those choices (Yontef, 2016).

Yontef and Schulz (2016) referred to dialogic existentialism as focus on the direct

experience of people's relationship with each other as they come in contact through

dialogue. Dialogic existentialism is an experiment in the here-and-now. It is the process

of paying attention from moment to moment of the experience while in contact to

increase understanding (Yontef & Schulz, 2016).

The Gestalt Group Process

The book "Gestalt Therapy: excitement and growth in the human personality"

written by Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, and published in 1951 formally introduced

gestalt therapy (Feder, 2013). Gestalt group therapy was presented initially by Laura and

Fritz Perls as workshops. The Gestalt Institute began to offer gestalt group therapy to the

public in 1958. There were three types of group models: the personal growth model, the

individually orientated psychotherapeutic model, and the process-oriented model (Feder

& Frew, 2008). These groups contained three processes; the intrapersonal process,

interpersonal process, and the group process. Eventually, the three models of groups

changed to the gestalt group process oriented experience.

Handlon and Fredericson (1998) discussed how the gestalt group process focuses on change by using experiment, holistic focus, an individual's phenomenological experience, and present process orientation. The authors of the paper used examples of dialogue from gestalt group sessions to articulate six assumptions of change that can take place within members through the process. These six vehicles are:

- An increase in awareness due to the interaction involving group members.

- The introduction of new experiences internally that challenge previous assumptions and expectations of behavior.

- During the process, individuals can experiment in order test new actions and receive feedback from the group members.

- The environment can be a place where support and acceptance can happen after sharing of personal secrets.

- Candid and honest feedback can occur according to various perspectives.

- A place where stimulating therapy occurs due to an increase in awareness as an individual observed another's therapeutic work.

Feder (2007) provided descriptions of the gestalt group process and the approach taken by him in the formation of groups. The prospective group members require evaluation according to their personality to balance the individuals in the group environment. Having two or more people who are rigid in the group could lead to inflexibility and create a non-productive environment. Having too many passive members is not ideal because the goal is contact and interaction within the group setting. Some members come from the client base with some coming from referrals with a group size of

8 members with a session time of 2 hours. Feder (2007) prepared his potential member by providing them with descriptions of the benefits of the group, the group model, group client feedback, and ground rules which are part of the interactive group therapy agreement to be read, and signed by the prospective member.

Feder (2007) listed the following group rules to include a participation agreement specific to experiences within the group to gain awareness of fixed patterns, and engage in experiments to gain clarity. The type of group (process-oriented) and the information on the principles of gestalt group therapy process provided. Gestalt group therapy has been shown to benefit individuals with mental health issues. According to Saadati, Shoaee, Pouryan, Alkasir, and Lashani (2014), the benefits of participating in group therapy included establishing social relationships, reduction of the feeling of loneliness, and it promoted the general mental health of the members. In addition to contributing to gestalt group literature Saadati et al. presented information pertaining to the benefits of the gestalt group therapy approach that focused on identifying the unfinished business, increasing awareness, and acceptance of self.

Fairchild (2004) and Fogerty, Bhar, Teiler, and O'Shea (2016) provided detailed analysis into the phenomenological field theory and group therapy. Fairchild (2014) suggested that therapists work would benefit deeper if they broaden their range to include phenomenological field theory. The author cited models from Irvin Yalom, Elaine Kepner, Melnick, Harman and several more experts in gestalt theory with the assertion that armed with the theory and methodology therapist should not limit themselves where the theory and methodology ends. The author called for a return to gestalt fundamentals

which included support of completeness, complexity, unity, and diversity to encourage investigation versus finality via classification. According to Fairchild (2014), therapists would benefit from working more relationally and in an experience-near way. The studies gave examples of the phenomenological field theory which is in line with the body of work.

What is Social Media?

Social media which is synonymous with social networking sites is defined as forms of electronic communication that users create online communities (Guadagno, Jones, Kimbrough, & Mattu, 2016). The users of the communities share information, ideas, messages, music, and videos. Examples of social media sites include Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Concerning social media, the National Institutes of Health (2014) reported that social media are increasingly affecting people's daily behavior, including their views related to health. Awareness about the role of social media in health is important considering that one in four people worldwide use social media, with that figure projected to rise from 1.47 billion in 2012 to 2.55 billion in 2017(Grant & Dill-Shackleford, 2017).

Social Media and Mental Healthcare

In an article written by Guadagno et al. (2016), said, it is important that psychological studies include social media and the effects on people for several reasons. Mental health and education currently utilize social media as forms of communication to benefit patients, and student needs to improve their welfare and awareness. The fields of mental health and education are using social media such as Facebook and Twitter as

platforms for communication to try and further serve the needs of patients and students. This forum is provided to increase communication for potential wellbeing and information sharing. The effect on people's self-efficacy while traversing social environments is a relevant issue. According to Perrin et al. (2015), in 2016, 90% of American adults under the age of 30 used their smart phones to access and browse social media which took up 20% of their time. In addition, Americans used tablets to access social media 75% of the time.

Psychological studies on social media are beneficial because new findings have the potential to provide information about new platforms, update studies on previous platforms, and study the psychological effects of media on individuals. The extent to which social media is used on a daily basis provides researchers with a venue to study psychological phenomena and create new research method to understand human behavior of how people view themselves, and their relationships with others (Guadagno et al., 2016).

In his study Siles (2011) examined the change from a blog form to a web format suitable for several groups of users to adopt. Blogs are a tool for users to express ideas, feelings, viewpoints, and keep account of events in the lives of users. Siles (2011) analyzed how various communities of online users emerged. The study reviewed the evolution of online diaries, personal publishing journals, and weblogs. The study examined technological stabilization of weblogs and practices of web appropriation. Three separate dynamics explored users appropriated weblogs which are weblogs that contain information from a reliable source, web application (blogger), and software

developers. The information contained in this article provided important information about the development of blogs. This paper also increased the understanding of technological stabilization of blogs for the safety of the users.

Qiu, Tang, and Whinston (2015) provided a history of the evolution of social media and the content included. Recently there has been an unprecedented explosion in information technology that allows diffusion of user-generated content on social networks. The landscape has changed to online videos. The benefits of online information increased the marketing of content and spurred business innovations. This study examined how learning and online networks effects drive the transmission of online videos. The study gave examples of how learning happens through informational externalities also known as free information. By using data sets from YouTube, they identified learning and network effects separately. The study showed how learning primarily drives the popularity of the social networks.

Kennedy (2016) concluded how sharing on social media is beneficial to the end-user. There has been focused emphasis on user-generated content and social media platforms. Sharing on social media happens from the appropriation of upbeat social value associated with mutual understandings of sharing. Examples of mutual understanding of sharing relate to community, generosity, values of cooperation, and participation. This paper concluded that social media platforms could provide various educational and behavioral change benefits.

Benefits of Internet Mental Health Delivery

Mook (2014) provided information that well aligned with research about the advantages and disadvantages of e-mental health service delivery, and the possibility of improving mental health care services through the Internet. The information focused on the Internet as a public mental health intervention and prevention tool. The paper provided the definition of e-mental healthcare which is a practice supported by an electronic process and communication. Services provided through e-mental health interventions include but are not limited to peer-support services, information, virtual applications, and real-time interaction with trained therapists (Mook, 2014). The information can be accessed by smartphones, tablets, desktop computers, and other devices that support internet applications. The benefits of e-mental health delivery are that it can be cost effective and reach more people than traditional office visits. The article provided information about opportunities for mental health care services and e-mental health. According to Mook (2014), most of the e-mental health interventions involve cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) self-help interventions which are effective while there is opportunity for psychoanalytical therapy in this field. There are still questions about the impact that e-mental health has even though it has the ability to supply more services to the population.

In a literature review, Lal and Adair (2014) found information on the strengths and limitations of e-mental health. According to the information that was compiled many of the authors in the literature review believed that e-mental health has the potential ability to provide services to populations in need especially in rural areas. The strengths

that Lal and Adair (2014) presented are improved accessibility, reduced cost, standardization, personalization, flexibility, consumer engagement, and interactivity. An additional strength is the benefit of anonymity and social support.

Some concerns by, Lal and Adair (2014) are beneficial service replacement along with the funding, money for improvements and attention. Other concerns presented by Lal and Adair (2014) are the cost to develop, deploy and evaluation of the e-mental health systems. The authors also noted the risk of non-evidence based information submission and professionals with inadequate training in providing treatment. In addition to the concerns presented was the lack of ability of professionals to form a therapeutic bond with the patients. Problematic concerns listed by Lal and Adair (2014) are the inability for individuals with mental and physical disabilities to be able to access the services provided by e-mental health, along with the potential for lack of privacy in the delivery process.

In a study performed by Wallin, Mattsson, and Olsson (2016) they provided information that shows the potential benefit of e-mental health applications and internet delivery at a low-cost to help individuals in need. The study by Wallin, Mattsson, and Olsson (2016) showed that individuals with a prior history of looking up health-related information on the internet were open to Internet-based interventions. Among the benefits found in the study for the use of internet treatment the participants noted control of content, duration, initiation, and termination of interactions. Several participants of the study noted that they preferred writing out their feelings and thoughts.

The internet may help individuals reduce their fear of face-to-face meetings to overcome the fear. Wallin, Mattsson, and Olsson (2016) suggested that a mix of online interaction and face-to-face treatment may provide optimal benefits for patient care. The paper provided information related to types of e-mental health initiatives along with strengths and benefits including concerns, and barriers. Wallin, Mattsson, and Olsson (2016) provided information about consumer engagement, reach and response to e-mental health applications. Wallin, Mattsson, and Olsson (2016) provided the evidence base for e-mental health along with e-mental health systems and policies. The information on the topic was found to be informative.

The authors of this study Younes, Chollet, Menard, and Melchior (2015) provided a history of the innovations in medicine and the way new technology has been expected to advance patient care. The focus of this study was e-mental healthcare and determining the frequency of use among young adults in France. The study compared France to England. The results confirmed that young people use online services in combination with additional services vs. substituting online services for other resources. The information within the study noted the need for improvements in of the quality of information regarding mental health care online.

A study performed by Alberts, Law, Ritterband, and Palermo (2018) examined the effect of adjunct internet-delivered cognitive behavior therapy (I-CBT) versus internet-delivered education (I-EDU). This study addressed the cost of healthcare of adolescents with chronic pain. The findings of the study for the time period of September 2011 to April 2014 showed that the health care cost for the participants significantly

decreased in the first year. The following years showed no significant decrease. The study reported positive effects of I-CBT on improving adolescent activity, anxiety, depression, and non-beneficial parenting behavior within 6 months compared to I-EDU.

In a study conducted by Rollman et al. (2018) they examined the effect of increased levels of patient engagement with an internet support group. The study period lasted 6 months and focused on participant with depression and anxiety. The participants were given access to a password protected internet support group and were encouraged to log in and participate by holding contests and having participants serve take turns moderating the group. The participation was monitored. In the 6 month period the individuals that had the highest levels of participation reported improvement in their symptoms and quality of life (Rollman et al., 2018).

In a study conducted by Molly, Maja, Jo-Anne, Michael, and Richard (2018) they examined the effect of internet-facilitated cognitive behavioral interventions as a supplement to face to face therapy for hoarding disorder. The study consisted of 12 participants were split into 2 group for 12 weeks. One group participated in group therapy plus 8 weeks of online therapy (CBT). The control group participated in 12 weeks of group therapy plus 8 weeks waitlist plus 8 weeks online therapy. The online therapy included CBT-based modules, psychoeducation, goal setting, motivation, relapse prevention and other important components. The results of the online interventions showed that the blending of the internet-facilitated cognitive behavioral interventions participants and the face-to-face participant demonstrated continued improvement in the

reduction of overall hoarding severity (Molly et al., 2018). The study results suggest the benefit of the treatment intervention.

Problematic Social Media Use

Lo, Ng, Fong, and Ho (2015) showed that problematic behavior and health issues might impact students due to Internet-based information and use. Due to the usage of the internet coupled with the lack of training given to students to protect their mental and physical health, the frequent and unsupervised use could become problematic. The Department of Health in 2014 commissioned the Report of Advisory Group on Health Effects of Use of Internet and Electronic Screen Products. The report advisory group included experts in the fields of psychology, education, information technology, social services, and youth group.

The report advisory group identified fourteen physical and psychosocial health issues associated with internet use in teens. Concerns were obesity, vision, fixed postures, hearing, injury and accident, infection, radiofrequency electromagnetic field, addition, cyber-bullying, cognitive development, social development, sleep deprivation, risky online sexual behavior, and aggressive behavior (Department of Health, 2014). The health tips to deflect the adverse reactions to internet use are as followed; increase physical activity, increase social activities real life, limit, screen time, blink, break and rest, adopt proper setting, protect hearing, ensure adequate sleep, awareness of cyber safety, behave oneself, restrict access to inappropriate content (Department of Health, 2014). According to Lo et al. (2015), it is advisable for students to receive guidance to develop beneficial personal and professional values to make sound judgments when using

the Internet to access reliable and trustworthy information. The Department of Health (2014) also advised that face to face interactions along with group learning activities would benefit intervention to minimize risk associated with dependence or misuse of the Internet.

In a study performed by Wang, Lee, and Hua (2015) theoretical and practical contributions were made to research in the study of social media. Reviewing social psychology literature can assist in combating social media dependence. Irrational and addictive behavior can result in the improper and unregulated use of social media. Empirical evidence provided information on the necessity of moderation of Internet use to avoid the adverse effect on behavior and society. This study presented information about the need for user education to combat the overuse of social media. Wang et al. (2015) stated that psychological dependence on social media has negative results for individuals and society.

According to the authors, it is important that scholars and practitioners systematically investigate addictive and dependent behavior related to social media. This study by Wang et al. (2015) suggested that when individuals understand how addiction works, they can create behaviors to combat addiction such as face to face interactions, and reduce reliance on social media. Salehan and Negahban (2013) emphasized the increased use of mobile phones and online social networking services in societies among the youth in this study. The authors suggested that extensive use of this technology can evolve into an addiction. According to this study, mobile addiction increased with the use of social networking services of mobile applications. Also, the results of this study show

that there are adverse effects associated with the size of the SNS network and intensity of use of SNS mobile applications (Salehan, & Negahban, 2013). Mobile phones are popular, and their applications are beneficial to the users. The use of mobile phones can have non-beneficial repercussions such as compulsive use, addiction, technostress, and interruption of working or studying. This study suggested that the need to communicate with others on mobile applications creates the drive to install more applications which satisfy a need to connect and communicate with others through mobile networks (Salehan, & Negahban, 2013).

Social Networking, Social Support, and Blogging

Currently, in the literature (Boyd, 2015: Nardon, Atens, & Gulanowski, 2015; Rains, Keating, 2011), the studies explored the social dimensions of health-related blogs as a means to marshal social support and, as a result, achieve some of the health benefits associated with supportive communications. According to Boyd (2015), studies show how social media is a supplement face-to-face contact and plays an important role in many people's lives. The networked public hosts a venue where individuals can host online expressions and content, have an audience who can listen, opportunity to share information with ease, and locate content (Boyd, 2015). According to Boyd (2015), individuals have the opportunity to place privacy guards on their social media for various reasons many place content that they feel is socially acceptable. Social media is a place where individuals post information for many different reasons, fun content, spiritual, create friendships, share photos, express emotions, share political views and more.

The study by Raines and Keating (2011) explored health blogging, social support, and psychosocial well-being and relationship between them in the social dimension of health-related blogging. Health blogs are a way people make connections and form ties that garner support to enhance their psychosocial well-being. According to Raines and Keating (2011), blogging is a beneficial way to generate online support when individuals experience emotions such as anxiety, and uncertainty in their everyday experiences. Expressive writing benefits may extend to blogging as a way to improve the health of individuals coping with serious health issues. Health blogging benefits individuals who are in need of social support when family ties are strong or weak.

Based on a study by Nardon, Atens, and Gulanowski (2015) which focused on blogs and the importance of social support contact for expatriates in a foreign country to facilitate adjustment. Blogging is a way of communicating with friends in their home country and making new contacts in their present environment. Blogging affords the individual the ability to access social support to adjust when they are not sure of themselves. Interaction through blogging provides encouragement and comfort to the users.

Expatriates may feel anxiety and isolated due to culture shock Nardon et al. (2015) compared their findings of face-to-face social support communication provides assistance while perspective shifts and enhances control through acceptance, assurance, venting and physical assistance. Computer-mediated social support provides informational, emotional, and tangible support (Nardon et al., 2015).

Invoking emotions and understanding the changes is a fundamental part of working with emotional difficulties (Lane, Ryan, Nadel, & Greenberg, 2015). In their study, Whitney and Smith (2015) examined emotional disclosure though journaling as a coping mechanism for maternal stress due to parenting children with disruptive behavior. The researchers used a randomized control and online journal writing intervention with a pre-test and post-test study design. Through testing, results showed that the mother's stress stemmed from the behavior of the children with ASD, ADHD, and SPD (Whitney& Smith, 2015). The results of the study showed that online journal writing which included emotional disclosure of negative emotions reduced the stress level of the mother resulting in an improved mother-child relationship (Whitney& Smith, 2015). The findings suggest that online journaling interventions (blogging) might be a cost-effective way to reduce stress (Whitney& Smith, 2015).

According to Canada, Brinkley, Peters, and Albright (2015) journaling has a long history of being used in the therapeutic setting. Journaling can be used as a vehicle for self-reflection and examination. Journaling is a tool used by therapists for clients to tell stories that are important to them. The journaling tool is a supplement to face-to-face therapy because of the limited time that is spent in therapy (Canada et al., 2015). In their study, Canada et al. (2015) examined the use of journaling for veterans that were incarcerated. The results of the study found that journaling was beneficial in improving communication, improving insight, and in skill building of self-reflection (Canada et al., 2015). In addition to the previous benefits listed journaling can aid in the maintenance of progress, developing new insight, and reflection of information from sessions.

Journaling can assist in the expression of suppressed thoughts that may cause cognitive impairment that may cause stress-related diseases (Canada et al., 2015). According to Canada et al. (2015) prior research presented that journaling is beneficial to mental well-being, physical well-being, improved grades for school-aged children, the unemployed, and laid off professionals.

Social Networking and Micro-Blogging

A type of social networking that has become popular is micro-blogging. Micro-blogging allows people to use their mobile devices, their personal pages, and instant messaging service to send short messages (Lai, & Yang, 2015). Micro-blogging is an easy access simplified blog where users can control access to their posts (Lai, & Yang, 2015). In a study by Li, Li, Hao, Guan and Zhu (2014), micro-bloggers submitted to testing to predict active user's personality traits from their blogging behavior. According to Li et al. (2014), previous studies have shown that web use through blogging can determine personality traits and found that extraverts use blogging to relieve anxiety. Li et al. (2014) study found that there was an increase in openness over 30 days of experience convergence. According to Li et al. (2014), what a person posts on their blog can be an indication of their personality. For example, micro-blogging behavior can indicate whether people are aggressive, open to sharing, engaging and willing to influence are some characteristics identified.

In a study, Lai and Yang (2015) explored the possible motivation of self-disclosure, information sharing, and perceived social support related to micro-blogging. The results of the study indicated that an individual's self-disclosure influenced

popularity and interpersonal needs (Lai, & Yang, 2015). The results also indicated that instant information sharing behavior was influenced by interpersonal and entertainment needs (Lai, & Yang, 2015). The individual's perceived extent of social support has a beneficial relationship with self-disclosure and instant information sharing behavior (Lai, & Yang, 2015).

Summary

In Chapter 2, the review of the literature is related to the basis of this study. The chapter includes an introduction to the study, literature search strategy, conceptual and theoretical foundation, phenomenology, literature review to key It includes introduction, conceptual and theoretical foundation, phenomenology, literature review related to key concepts, capacity of self-awareness, freedom and responsibility, identity and relationship, searching for meaning, anxiety as a part of life, death and non-being, contact and awareness, the gestalt group process, what is social media, social media and mental healthcare, benefits of internet mental health delivery, problematic social media use, social networking social support and blogging, social networking and micro-blogging, and the summary.

Literature provided examined the paradoxical theory of change, the gestalt group process, and the online group environment through means of blogging. Provided in this chapter is history and information outlining gestalt theory in philosophy, gestalt psychology, group therapy, and gestalt therapy to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenological methodology. Gestalt therapy along with treatment philosophy is defined, and examples provided. There are outlines of various uses of therapy which

helps to give meaning to the concepts. The definition of gestalt therapy and what makes gestalt different from other types of psychotherapeutic modalities are in the review. Information elaborated on concepts of gestalt therapy to gain understanding. The concepts used to develop awareness are, working relationally, working in the here and now, phenomenological practice, working with the embodiment, field-sensitive practice, working with contacting processes, and experimental attitude.

This chapter gives a description of the gestalt group process and approach taken. Included in the review are the rules of the group process. Provided is information on the principles of gestalt group therapy process and types of groups. Included is an explanation of selections of group members. There are examples of the phenomenological field theory in this section which is in line with the body of work.

This review provided a history of the evolution of social media and the content included. This review included information on social media platforms for various educational and behavioral change modalities. Presented is E-mental health information and how it can be beneficial for the delivery of interventions. This chapter presented studies that explained how the use of web-based low-cost delivery of targeted mental health promoting interventions was beneficial. Therefore the gap in the literature shows how blogging and face-to-face treatments may be beneficial to individuals who are presently in therapy. The qualitative approach of this therapy will explore the possibilities of this question. In Chapter 3, I will outline the introduction, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, credibility, external validity, dependability, confirmability, ethical procedures, and a summary.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the potential benefit of using an interactive online environment (i.e., secured blog) for gestalt group members and facilitators to provide feedback and support as a supplement to gestalt group session. This chapter includes a description of the study design, the rational of the research, the instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, and data analysis. This qualitative phenomenological study examined the lived experience of group members who had access to group notes through online secure social networks. This chapter provides information on the qualitative method and design that was used to help understand the participants' experiences. The qualitative method addressed the overlapping phenomena to explore group configurations and to augment the understanding of the online social network experience. This exploration included interviews with gestalt group members who had experience with the online group note environment.

One of the facets of gestalt therapy is a phenomenological method of awareness. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the potential benefit of using an interactive online environment (i.e., secured blog) for gestalt group members and facilitators. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the feedback and support given and received as a result of this online tool which supplements gestalt group session. Also, face-to-face interviews, software to aid in the interview process along with software to aid in associating themes with information provided in the interviews was used to gain an understanding of the shared experiences.

Research Design

The phenomenological design for this research was suitable because the study focus was on awareness and shared lived experiences. By exploring the extensive literature on the subject of gestalt group therapy, blogging, and internet social networking, the aim was to investigate how participation in the online group note environment significantly aided in the psychological well-being associated with social interaction and awareness. The phenomenological design involves an exploration of a person's experience through the interpretation and meaning of that experience. Phenomenology focuses more on what and how than the why. The goal of the focus is to increase awareness and reduce bias opinion about the validity of thought (Yontef, 2002).

In this phenomenological design interview questions were designed to help explore the lived experiences of the participants in the study. The interview questions were designed to maintain a focus on the phenomenological inquiry. According to Levitt et al. (2017), by taking an objective approach to analyze information, biases and human error are minimized. The interview protocol, in keeping with the phenomenological paradigm, consisted of open-ended, and non-leading questions, a close focus on the interviewee, and involved encouraging interviewees to elaborate on their stories. Also, two methods of interviewing the participants included collecting data, a face to face method and Skype using EVAER software which is a product of VoIP. The EVAER software on Skype allows the interviewer the advantage of recording the video conversation and the added benefit of capturing both parties in the recording (Hanna, 2012; Cater, 2011). The benefit of using Skype in the qualitative interview process

includes being able to use the tool anywhere in the world (LoIacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016). The use of Skype alleviated the restrictions of location.

Rationale

The rationale for this qualitative phenomenological design was to explore the lived experiences of gestalt online group members to capture the story of the participants in the study. According to Levitt et al. (2017), the focus of qualitative research is to gain knowledge regarding lived experiences, which includes social processes. Also, this phenomenological study could lead to gained knowledge regarding gestalt online group experiences as a supplement to group therapy. The results of the study could provide needed knowledge of the phenomenon which might contribute to evidence-based interventions involving gestalt therapy.

Also, this study has the potential to inform therapists, and mental health clients regarding options to extend therapeutic interventions beyond traditional interventions by using supervised online interactive private blogs. The online access could provide 24-hour access to support systems needed beyond the once a week traditional group therapy. This study could also expand the understanding of online group support systems.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were developed to explore the significance of the online environment as a tool to benefit mental health patients and therapists. Four initial research questions were developed to help explore the lived experiences of the participants in the study.

RQ1: What is the lived experience of individuals who are participating in gestalt group therapy with the added benefit of online group notes?

RQ2: In what way do group members experience unfinished dialogue from group sessions via online group notes and blog?

RQ3: Do people who participate in gestalt process group with the added benefit of online group notes perceive increased levels of psychological well-being over time?

RQ4: Is the online group note lived experience beneficial or non-beneficial in raising awareness of self and the environment?

Role of the Researcher

For this study, I acted as the primary researcher, and as such I collected all of the data in this research. I did not have any personal or professional relationship with the study participants. There was no conflict of interest with the study participants. The study participants were selected through a purposeful random network sampling method. The use of purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify and choose populations that are related to the phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015).The network method focused on psychologists with private practices that provide gestalt group therapy using online blogs as a supplemental tool.

As the primary researcher, through referrals from psychologists, I contacted potential study participants. For ethical reasons, I informed participants of the nature and background of the study. When participants agreed to take part in the study, I provided them with a consent form to participate. The procedure for recruitment and participation in the study were as followed. The criterion for participation was based on the

individual's participation in gestalt group therapy and online blog participation. The study participants were selected through a random purposeful network sampling method.

The network method was focus on psychologists with private practices that provide gestalt group therapy using online blogs as a supplemental tool. Through random network sampling, I contacted psychologists known to me about potential study participants. I requested that they present my request for participants in my study to their gestalt therapy groups that participate in a secured blog. The participants of the study consisted of males and females. The ages of the participants ranged from 30 to 64. The participant's vocation, ethnicity, and religious background varied. The goal was to find 15 participants to take part in this study. To reduce the impact of any personal bias on my part, I used open-ended questions in my interviews and recorded all interviews. Being the primary researcher, through referrals from the psychologists I contacted the potential study participants.

Methodology

Participation Selection Logic

The participants in the study were selected with the use of purposeful random sampling which was a deliberate way of choosing the sample. This type of sample selection was done to get the optimal amount of relevant data. I chose this method of sampling to ensure that the participants meet the criteria for the study. Study participants were selected based on their participation in gestalt group therapy and online blog participation. The participants of the study consisted of males and females. The ages of the participants ranged from age 30 to 64 years of age. The participant's vocation,

ethnicity, and religious background varied. There was one interview per participant for study data collection, and no additional time was needed. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes.

According to Maxwell (2013), the reasoning behind qualitative research is to gather data from storytelling, then explain, describe, and interpret the information in depth. I choose a sampling of 15 participants to make sure that I had an effective sample size that ensured saturation in this qualitative study. The sample size was chosen to ensure that it was large enough to get a purposeful sampling yet small enough to contain the thematic analysis (Turner-Bowker et al., 2018). According to Guetterman (2015), there have been studies that have had and assessment of saturation where that sample size was lower. Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006) conducted a study on data set that included 12 interviews and found that saturation was achieved.

Through network sampling, I contacted psychologists who are known to me about potential study participants. I requested that they present my request for participants in my study to their gestalt therapy groups that participated in the secured blog. I contacted the individuals that were referred to me by email or phone whichever was preferred by the perspective participant. I send the potential participants an email outlining the purpose of the study (see Appendix B). After I received confirmation of acceptance into the study by the participant I emailed them a consent form for review and signature of consent (see Appendix C). When I received the signed consent form back, I scheduled an interview with each study participant.

Instrumentation

According to Yazan (2015), in a qualitative study the collection tools needed by researcher to become effective interviewer are good questions, probes, an interview guide, initiating the interview, interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer, recording and evaluating interview data. I created a semi structured list of questions (see Appendix A) tailored to gather information from the participants about the subject matter. In this qualitative phenomenological study the questionnaire, the interview, the interviewer's field notes, direct observation, and participant observations were be used as data collection tools. The interviews were digitally recorded, and I transcribed the recordings. After the transcription was complete, a copy was forwarded to the participant for review and verification. The transcription was analyzed. Supplemental data in the form of notes taken by the interviewer about the participant's nonverbal behavior was documented.

This section of Chapter 3 identifies the methods and instruments used to collect data. This study used two methods of interviewing the participants collecting data, a face to face method and Skype using EVAER software which is a product of VoIP. The EVAER software on Skype allows the interviewer the advantage of recording the video conversation and the added benefit of capturing both parties in the recording (Hanna, 2012; Cater, 2011). The benefit of using Skype in the qualitative interview process includes being able to use the tool anywhere in the world (LoIacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016). The use of Skype alleviated the restrictions of location.

Skype is an economical delivery system which saves time and money for the interviewer and the participant in the study. Time and money are saved in travel time and the need for additional tools which helps to minimize the research budget and increase the range of participants who can be interviewed in the study (LoIacono et al., 2016). One of the obstacles that I fore saw was the location in the interview process which might have been unfamiliar or uncomfortable for the participants. Skype offers the opportunity for the participant to stay in the comfort of their home where they might be more relaxed (LoIacono et al., 2016). The majority of the participant may have constraints on their time such as family and employment and the use of Skype for interviews will create more flexibility for the interview process (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013).

Rapport

Rapport is an important part of the interview process and involves trust and comfort of the participant so that they can open up to the interviewer (King & Horrocks, 2010). Sietz (2015) found that rapport was achieved quicker when emails were exchanged before the interview about the process. The use of Skype does not create a problem in having a rapport with the participant (LoIacono et al., 2016). The use of Skype increases the possibility of the participant opening up because they are in their environment which is safe (LoIacono et al., 2016). For those participants that are shy and introverted sharing over the computer screen might be more comfortable (LoIacono et al., 2016). During the interview, field note taking was part of the process. It is important to be able to see the participant's reactions to document the body language. According to LoIacono et al. (2016), interviews done via Skype provide a view of the head and

shoulders and by focusing specifically on these body parts; it can counterbalance the need for the view of the whole body.

Skype has the benefit of being used on smart phones or tablets that have a camera and the location of the interview setting may provide additional information about the participant chosen setting (LoIacono et al., 2016). Privacy is an ethical issue that must be addressed in the study that uses Skype. The participants were advised that they will be recorded and password protected on the computer. The participants that choose to use Skype were informed of the terms of the use of Skype which include that they reserve the right to review the content that is submitted on their site to make sure that there is no copyright infringement, illegal or inappropriate content (LoIacono et al., 2016).

Interview Question Logic

The study used 12 open-ended questions that were semi-structured that can be found in Appendix A. The following four research questions were developed to explore this relationship:

RQ1: What is the lived experience of individuals who are participating in gestalt group therapy with the added benefit of online group notes?

RQ2: In what way do group members experience unfinished dialogue from group sessions via online group notes and blog?

RQ3: Do people who participate in gestalt process group with the added benefit of online group notes perceive increased levels of psychological well-being over time?

RQ4: Is the online group note lived experience beneficial or non-beneficial in raising awareness of self and the environment?

This study is a phenomenological qualitative study. The qualitative approach was selected to interpret the phenomenological analysis of the lived experience of group members who had access to group notes through online secure social networks. The phenomenological approach explores descriptions to gain an in-depth interpretation (Davidsen, 2013). The qualitative methods focus on a knowledge-based exploration (Davidsen, 2013). The qualitative method has been used by psychologists for many years to gain an understanding of human behavior (Heglar & Cuevas, 2017). For these reasons, a qualitative approach instead of the quantitative approach was used.

The semi-structured interviews allowed for additional questions to be asked to elaborate on the responses to the 12 open-ended questions to get a more in-depth understanding of the participants feelings, awareness and support of the blog experience (Thylstrup et al., 2016). Because of my experience with the online blog, I was able to relate to the experiences that the participant expressed to delve deeper to extract more information from them. The interview questions are structured to encourage the participant to express their emotions related to the experience of the online blog. The questions were centered on the interactions that are made while blogging. The questions encourage the participants to review their therapeutic work and express opinions on the benefits related to sharing on the blog. The questions inquired on the comfort level of sharing in the online blog environment. The questions asked the participant about their use of the blog to go deeper into resolving unfinished business and how they went about

doing this. There were questions that encourage the expression of how support is felt and expressed on the blog. There were questions regarding the benefits and non-beneficial aspects of the blog in addition to group therapy. All of these questions were geared to provide participants with a starting point to be able to express how they felt about their experiences.

For Researcher-Developed Instruments

In a review of the literature for this study, due to the unique nature, no instrument was found that would adequately relay the concepts of the study. The 12 questions in the interview stage of this dissertation where designed by the interviewer. When a dissertation student creates their own or modifies an instrument, field testing is required (Roberts, 2010). In order to prove content validity a review of the instrument is needed. Roberts (2010) suggested that five to 10 individuals review the instrument to evaluate issues involving validity. What should be found in the pretesting of the instrument are comprehensive instructions, clear wording, appropriate answers, sufficient detail, area differences, problematic sections, unrelated questions, length, and suitability (Roberts, 2010). IRB guidelines do not require prior approval for field testing. In field testing the instrument, five people were asked to review 12 interview questions (Appendix D). The field test document was sent by email and returned in the same manner. The results of the field test suggested no changes to be made to the interview questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

All studies that require human participants must have approval from the IRB whether it is a qualitative, quantitative or mixed method (Yin, 2014). This is necessary to

make sure that ethical obligations of minimal risk of harm, confidentiality of the participants, and fair treatment (Yin, 2014). In keeping with the Walden University research protocols and IRB regulations, ethical standards were conducted for this study. As the sole researcher, I conducted all of the interviews.

Procedures for Recruitment

I contacted the individuals who were referred to me by email or phone whichever was preferred by the participant. I sent the potential participants an email outlining the purpose of the study (see Appendix B). After I receive confirmation of acceptance into the study by the participant I email them a consent form for review and signature of consent (see Appendix C). I provided the participants with a consent form to gain their legal permission to record them. For ethical reasons, I reviewed the consent form with the participants. I informed the participants of the nature and the background of the study.

Participation

The participants were informed that they have the option of not participating in the study. I answered all of the questions that the participant has about their part in the study in keeping with full disclosure. I informed the participant that they had the option of not answering questions that they choose not to answer and that they can conclude the interview at any time that they choose. There were two copies of the consent form signed, one for the participant and one copy for my records. When I receive the signed consent form back, I scheduled an interview with the study participant. In keeping with APA privacy and confidentiality standards (APA, 2017), I password protected my electronic documents and kept my paper documents in a locked drawer. In keeping with APA

privacy and confidentiality practices (APA, 2017), I did not use the participants identity

to ensure that no one would be able to identify participants. The option of meeting in my

office or their office or their home or via Skype was an option presented to the

participants.

Data Collection

The research protocols and procedures were reviewed before the start of the

study. To reduce the impact of any personal bias on my part, I used open-ended questions

in my interviews and record all interviews. I provided the participants with a consent

form to gain their legal permission to record them. I ensured that the environment that the

interviews took place in were quiet, private, and convenient for the participants. I have

created interview questions that focus on the experience of the interviewee to maintain an

interview protocol. The interview took place in a setting that was secure and private. In

keeping with APA privacy and confidentiality standards, I password protected my

electronic documents and kept my paper documents in a locked drawer. In keeping with

APA privacy and confidentiality practices I did not use the participant's identity, this was

to ensure that no one was be able to identify participants I used pseudonyms. For

example, the participants will be identified as according to their initials. I did not use the

therapy center names or the psychologist's names to avoid association with the

participants. To reduce the impact of any personal bias on my part, I used open-ended

questions in my interviews and recorded all interviews. I created interview questions that

focus on the experience of the interviewee to maintain an interview protocol. The

interview consisted of 12 open-ended questions based on the research study questions

(Appendix A). At the end of the interview each participant was debriefed by asking them how did you feel about your experience and the level of sharing you expressed about your online experience? I informed the participants that there would be one interview per participant for study data collection unless the duration and time needs to be extended. In the case of additional interview I would request more time from the participant. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. If the recruitment number of participants did not meet 15 participants I would have reduced the amount by 12 participants.

The video interviews when completed were uploaded into the NVivo software and files were created. The NVivo software can import data in the form of pdf files, word documents, audio files, datasets, videos, and pictures for data examination (Looney, 2016).

Supplemental data in the form of notes about the participant's nonverbal behavior were documented. The purpose of the notes was to examine the participants experience beyond their awareness by capturing the non-verbal behavior. These notes were taken in a way that it would not disrupt the interview. The notes were entered into the NVivo program. The NVivo software follows the research design and analyzes semi-structured interviews, surveys, field notes, and journal articles, then performs data analysis and information management (Brandão, 2015). The program recorded my insights of the interview, observations of the interview and linked it to the information that was analyzed. With the use of the technology of the cloud capability, the program safety of information retention was assured.

Data Analysis Plan

According to Silverman (2016), the qualitative interviewing process provides opportunities for researchers to collect and review data that varies yet comes together to tell a story which is proof of the phenomenological experience. The phenomenological theory was used as the research methodology for this qualitative study. As stated in chapter 1, Beisser's (1970) paradoxical theory of change was used as the theoretical framework for this study. The following techniques were used in this study. I transcribed the data that I collect through digital recording and analyze the data. The interviews were transcribed using the dragon naturally speaking software program and NVivo software. The focus of the responses was compared to the responses of the participants and then identified any similarities, differences or patterns. After the transcription was complete, a copy was forwarded to the participant for review and verification. The transcription was analyzed. The internal validity is the trustworthiness and believability of the findings that have been interpreted (Silverman, 2016). In this study, internal validity was checked by interviews that were digitally recorded, and the recordings were be transcribed. After the transcription was complete, a copy was forwarded to the participant for review and verification. The transcription was analyzed. Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the quality of the research and the validity of the results (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017).

Analyze interview data and generate codes

The data collection tool is a questionnaire with12 open-ended questions that is semi-structured that can be found in appendix A. Qualitative based research that takes

into consideration the values of the participants and researcher provides a clearer, understandable, and subjective view of the phenomena (Juknevičienė, 2016). The semi-structured interview allowed for additional questions to be asked to elaborate on the responses to the 12 open-ended questions to get a more in-depth understanding of the participant's feelings, awareness and support of the blog experience (Thylstrup et al., 2016). The NVivo computer program was used to identify potential themes present in the non-numerical data collected for the coding process. The NVivo program provided codes for the open-ended questions with the use of a matrix and compared the answers of the participants. The NVivo program provided key topics, frequent word use and themes. The NVivo provided a visual representation of the transcribed interviews with charts to compare key themes.

Test Interview Data for Saturation

In qualitative research, the sample size should be large enough to capture as many perceptions that are relative to the study (Mason, 2010). The sample size must not be too large because the data will be repetitive or unimportant (Mason, 2010). Mason (2010) reported that smaller studies might be able to achieve saturation quicker than larger studies depending on the quality of the information obtained. The use of in-depth interviews and questions that provide the participant the opportunity to express their feelings to tell their story, in a phenomenological way, so saturation is obtainable. I choose a sampling of 15 participants to make sure that I had an effective sample size that ensured saturation in this qualitative study. The sample size was chosen to ensure that it was large enough to get a purposeful sampling yet small enough to contain the thematic

analysis (Turner-Bowker et al., 2018). According to Guetterman (2015), there have been studies that have had an assessment of saturation where that sample size was lower. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) conducted a study on data set that included 12 interviews and found that saturation was achieved. Saturation is when no new code and no new themes are found (Saunders et al., 2017). During the interview when the responses to the questions begin to duplicate themselves, and the theme starts to repeat itself saturation is achieved (Saunders et al., 2017).There were no discrepant cases, had there been a description and reason for them would have included. I only included information that was consistent with the data. This study consisted of 12 questions with 15 participants. Each participant told their own story, and the themes may be similar or different. In this phenomenological study saturation was met when there were no new themes. The NVivo software was able to show saturation when it happened (Looney, 2016).

Final Analysis

A final analysis was created that identified the themes associated with the participant's stories that were told during the interviews. The information from the notes of the interviewer of observations and reflections were included in the final analysis. The data entered into NVivo was stored, organized, and categorized so that is could be easily evaluated, interpreted, and explored (Looney, 2016). The use of graphs generated by the NVivo software program was presented in the final analysis for visual presentation of the themes (Looney, 2016). The report was written according to the standards of the accepted

academic guidelines (Sutton, 2015). This final report was by Walden University

dissertation standards.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

According to Levitt et al. (2017), credibility refers to the accuracy with which the

information is collected and interpreted from the perspective of the interviewee. There

are several methods used to validate credibility in the findings of studies. One method is

triangulation which uses several sources of data that compare and check the accuracy of

the data (Yazan, 2015). This study compared data in cases to each other. Member

checking is another method to validate credibility (Yazan, 2015). In this study after the

data had been collected a copy of the information was given to the interviewees to gather

feedback to ensure accuracy.

Another way to address credibility is through case study protocols and the use of

databases. In this study, the data was collected on a digital device in order to capture the

participants interview to ensure credibility. The use of a journal that includes observation

notes and reflections of the process was maintained. A questionnaire was designed to

capture the phenomenon of the lived online blog experience to further assure credibility.

A detailed account of the study was given to all of the participants to ensure an

understanding of the experience. This was also ensuring credibility.

Transferability

External validity refers to the significance of the study, mutual exchange of

information, and the significance of information given (Konradsen, Kirkevold, & Olson,

2013). External validity also refers to the description of the information that participants in a study provide that is thick enough to make sure that the reader can make an informed decision about the how the findings can be used in various settings and situations (Konradsen et al., 2013). External validity ensures that language in the research maintains the ability to be understood by others to determine its merit and worth (Konradsen et al., 2013). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is a form of external validity which describes how the phenomenon or findings of the study can be applied or useful to theory, practice or subsequent research. The qualitative and quantitative approach both use data collection to direct findings and assumption (Padgett, 2017). The difference is in the methods used to collect the data and come to conclusions (Padgett, 2017). The quantitative approach uses statistical analyses, uses an outsider perspective, it is variable-centered, particularistic, non-contextual, and deductive (Padgett, 2017). The qualitative approach uses observation, interviews, a person-centered approach, holistic features, and inductive reasoning (Padgett, 2017).The transferability in this study was limited due to the narrow focus of the study and the atypical criteria of the participants of Gestalt group member with online group note experience. According to Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, and Blackman (2016), due to the smaller sample size and individual perspectives in qualitative research duplicating findings of the phenomena to other research becomes impossible.

Strategies for checking external validity involve members of the study checking the data to ensure credibility (Konradsen et al., 2013). This review by participants gives the participants the opportunity to check the work by the researcher for correctness and

errors (Konradsen et al., 2013). Member checking has qualities of reliability and internal validity due to the verification by the participant (Konradsen et al., 2013). Member checking also provides the participant the opportunity to ensure that their story is correctly interpreted by the researcher (Konradsen et al., 2013). To address this issue in the research, a copy of the transcript of the interview was provided to the study participants.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability refers to the process of recording information in detail so that the study can be replicated by others (Rapport, Clement, Doel, & Hutchings, 2015). Dependability also refers to presenting information in the study so that others can interpret it to share the information (Rapport et al., 2015). This subject of dependability was addressed with the use of a trial audit. Confirmability refers to findings that portray the participant's experiences and ideas as opposed to those of the researcher (Rapport et al., 2015). According to Levitt et al. (2017), the researcher may influence the strategies of the research such as participant selection and research question, but the researcher should never collect data to confirm only their perspective. The researcher goal should be to be open to all information regardless of the perspective that will direct their analysis (Levitt et al., 2017). This subject of confirmability was addressed in this research study by using the same questionnaire for all participants. A review of the interviews by the participants ensured that their perspectives were accurate. Finally, intra-inter coder agreement was not needed. NVivo software was used to cross check codes.

Ethical Procedures

The protection and rights of the study participants were guarded against harm by using the ethical principles of the psychologists and code of conduct (APA, 2017). All of the participants in the study received an invitation to participate which outlines the specifics of the study including informed consent and disclosure about their right to privacy. The research protocols and procedures were reviewed before the start of the study. Verification of understanding of the rights of the participants and informed consent were verified through verbal and written acknowledgment. The participant recruitment and data collection did not start until IRB approval to collect data was received for the study from Walden University (see Appendix E).

To reduce the impact of any personal bias on my part, I stayed neutral and allowed the participants to express themselves without interruption. I used open-ended questions in my interviews and record all interviews. I provided the participants with a consent form to gain their legal permission to record them. I will ensured that the environment that the interviews took place in is quiet, private, and convenient for the participants. I created interview questions that focused on the experience of the interviewee.

In keeping with APA privacy and confidentiality standards, I password protected my electronic documents and kept my paper documents in a locked drawer. In a research study, participants have the right to expected privacy, and the information of the participants must be concealed by the researcher (Yin, 2014). In keeping with APA privacy and confidentiality practices I did not use the participant's confidential identity,

this was to ensure that no one will be able to identify participants I will use pseudonyms (APA, 2017). For example, the participants will be identified as Participant A, Participant B. I did not use the therapy center names or the psychologist's names to avoid association with the participants. The participants were reminded that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without adverse effects. Documents from the participants were scanned into a password protected file in my computer. After seven years the participant's data will be deleted from my computer file, and the paper documents will be shredded to ensure privacy. The participants in this study are not considered part of a vulnerable population, therefore, did not need additional approval other that IRB clearance and participant approval. No identifying information was collected from participants.

Summary

Chapter 3 includes the methods and approaches that were used to conduct this study. Information on the type of study that was conducted was included in this chapter as well as the rationale and procedures that were used in the study. A detail description of the instruments used for data collection was detailed. Potential ethical concerns were addressed. Information on issues related to credibility, the role of researcher, external validity, internal validity, dependability, issues of trustworthiness, and conformability was addressed. Chapter 4 includes an introduction, setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a summary.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how the online blog experiences of gestalt group members was beneficial and how. I focused on the potential benefit of using an interactive online environment (i.e., secured blog) for gestalt group members and facilitators as a supplement to the gestalt group session. The following four research questions were developed to explore this relationship:

RQ1: What is the lived experience of individuals who are participating in gestalt group therapy with the added benefit of online group notes?

RQ2: In what way do group members experience unfinished dialogue from group sessions via online group notes and blog?

RQ3: Do people who participate in gestalt process group with the added benefit of online group notes perceive increased levels of psychological well-being over time?

RQ4: Is the online group note lived experience beneficial or non-beneficial in raising awareness of self and the environment?

An in-depth interview was used to identify meanings of themes through participants' shared experiences. I gained a better understanding of how the online blog experience benefited those that were open to participating. I also gained a better understanding of why some members chose not to participate actively. This chapter details the participant demographics, setting, thematic findings, and coding procedures. Also in this chapter data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness are discussed. In this chapter are descriptions of the results and the summary.

Setting

The participants were recruited using a purposeful selection from private practices located in the Southern New Jersey area. The study participants were located in Mt. Laurel, Pennsauken, Collingswood, and Burlington Township, and one participant was recorded in the UK while she was visiting family. The interviews were conducted using different methods. The interviews were conducted on Skype and FaceTime, which allowed face-to-face interview, and my Galaxy 7 phone was used to record audio and video in my office. All interviews were recorded in settings where there were no interruptions or external events that would interfere with the collection of data or results of the study. The study participants chose settings that were convenient for them. The study was IRB approved in addition to following the guidelines of the Belmont Report (Belmont Report, 1979). Also, the researcher received NIH certification (2801729 completed 12/15/2018).

Demographics

Individuals for this study volunteered to participate and described their experiences of their interactions of the online blog. All of the fifteen study participants identified as individuals that participated in a gestalt group blog as a supplement to group therapy. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, only initials were used as a prescribed pseudonym. The participants included five males (CM, CC, JL, JR, and PM) and ten females (ST, SM, RL, BM, CE, DC, LR, YB, TM, and CD. The ages ranged from 30 to 64 years. Length of participation in the group blog ranged from 1 to 10 years. Fourteen participants were employed at the time of the interview process. One participant

(BM) was a stay at home housewife. Two participants were self- employed (ST is a freelance editor and CE is small business owner). Table 1 summarizes participants' characteristics.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Participants	Current Age	Gender	Professional Category
ST	48	Female	Freelance editor
SM	54	Female	Therapist
RL	31	Female	Teacher
BM	56	Female	Housewife
CE	45	Female	Business owner
CM	50	Male	Quality engineer
CC	60	Male	Administrator
JL	30	Male	Mechanic
DC	50	Female	Account manager
JR	30	Male	Fork lift driver
LR	64	Female	Cook
YB	54	Female	Payroll manager
CD	30	Female	Project manager
PM	31	Male	Sales manager
TM	30	Female	Clerk

Data Collection

Sietz (2015) found that rapport was achieved quicker when emails were exchanged before the interview about the process. Fifteen participants took part in the study. I established rapport with the study participants by making sure that they felt comfortable with me asking questions before the interview. Rapport was achieved in the screening process. I spoke to the participants over the phone after receiving confirmation that they were interested in participating in the study after reading the flyer. I contacted the individuals over the phone and ensured that they understood the study. I allowed the

participants to ask me questions before sending the consent form. The screening process lasted from 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the questions asked by the participants.

A convenient time and place was determined by an e-mail once the consent form was returned. I ensured that the participants were comfortable and in a secure location to maintain anonymity at the time of the interview. The face-to-face semi-structured interviews lasted from 18 to 30 minutes. The variation of the interview length was due to the activity and inactivity of the participants on the blog. The face-to-face interviews were recorded using a computer video program, and a Galaxy 7 phone to record audio and video. The data collection involved the use of 12 open-ended questions (see Appendix A). All interviews followed the same procedures. There were no variations in data or unusual circumstances encountered during data collection.

Data Analysis

According to Silverman (2016), the qualitative interviewing process provides opportunities for researcher to collect and review data that varies yet comes together to tell a story which is proof of the phenomenological experience. The fifteen participants' interviews were transcribed and then imported into NVivo. The data was organized according to the interview questions. A word frequency query was run to organize the data into themes. The data was reviewed according to the results of the word query to identify themes. The themes results "group experience, unfinished dialogue, perceived levels of psychological wellbeing, and beneficial or non-beneficial". The sub-theme "Vulnerable" emerged from the data collected from the participants who were less involved on the blog. There were no discrepant cases in the study. The semi-structured

interview allowed for additional questions to be asked to elaborate on the responses. The 12 open-ended questions provided me with the opportunity to gain a more in-depth understanding of the participants' feelings, awareness, and support of the blog experience.

The NVivo computer program was used to identify potential themes present in the non-numerical data collected for the coding process. The NVivo program provided codes from the open-ended questions with the use of a matrix and compared the answers of the participants. The NVivo program provided key topics, frequent word use, and themes. The NVivo provided a visual representation of the transcribed interviews with charts to compare key themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

According to Levitt et al. (2017), credibility refers to the accuracy with which the information is collected and interpreted from the perspective of the interviewee. I used several methods to validate credibility in the findings of studies. I transcribed each interview from the recordings. I checked the transcriptions twice for errors against the recordings. In this study, after the data collection, a copy of the interview was given to the interviewees to gather feedback to ensure accuracy. The accuracy of the transcriptions were confirmed with the participants. To minimize bias, the transcribed interviews were used during the coding process.

Another way to address credibility was through case study protocols and the use of databases (Yazan, 2015). In this study, the data was collected on a digital device to capture the participant's interview to ensure credibility. A questionnaire was designed to

capture the phenomenon of the lived online blog experience to assure credibility. A detailed account of the facets of the study was given to all of the participants to ensure an understanding of the experience. The transferability in this study was limited due to the narrow focus of the study and the atypical criteria of the participants of Gestalt group member with online group note experience. According to Moon, et al. (2016), due to the smaller sample size and individual perspectives in qualitative research duplicating findings of the phenomena to other research becomes impossible.

Dependability refers to the process of recording information in detail so that the study can be replicated by others. Dependability also refers to presenting information in the study so that others can interpret it to share the information (Rapport et al., 2015). This subject of dependability was addressed with the use of a trial audit. Confirmability was addressed in this research study by using the same questionnaire for all participants. A review of the interviews by the participants ensured that their perspectives were accurate.

Results

There were four research questions addressed in this phenomenological research study: (a) What was the lived experience of individuals who were participating in gestalt group therapy with the added benefit of online group notes? (b) In what way did group members experience unfinished dialogue from group sessions via online group notes and blog? (c) Did people who participate in gestalt process group with the added benefit of online group notes perceive increased levels of psychological well-being over time? (d) Was the online group note lived experience beneficial or non- beneficial in raising

awareness of self and the environment? The four research questions were used to develop the 12 interview questions (see Appendix A). All interview questions were asked in the same order.

Thematic Findings

The themes in this section were constructed from the 15 participants' statements and organized by order of significance. The themes identified in Table 2 are based on the interviews of participants' experience in the gestalt group blog. Below, is a description of each of the four themes and subthemes identified from the data from the research and interview questions and as described by the participants.

Table 2
Thematic Findings

Themes	Sub-themes
Group Experience	(A) Emotional expression
	(B) Vulnerable
	(C) Writing
	(D) Feedback
Unfinished Dialogue	(A) Connected
	(B) Interactions
Perceived levels of psychological wellbeing	(A) Supported
	(B) Affects over time
Beneficial or Non-beneficial	(A) Enhance the work
	(B) Communicate
	(C) Why blog

Theme 1: Group Experience

The group experience was the first overarching theme that presented itself from the participants' statements. The participants shared their feeling about when they initially started on the online group blog. The participants also shared their experiences of their subsequent interactions on the online blog. The group experience presented itself in various ways to the participants.

CE reflected on what she valued from her group experience. She shared, CE **"I** loved it and I found it really helpful. It was a summary of what happened. There was insight that our group leader would relay." RL shared the similar feelings, RL stated, " I felt like it was anxiety producing to wait for other people to respond but I liked having that piece to kind of sort through, and continue conversations from the session." When asked about the group experience SM stated, "I think it required me as a therapist to show a level of vulnerability to share my own reactions and feedback about what other people are doing, and then to flip flop back into the role of facilitator, and then to receive their feedback. I feel that without that experience I might not have shared some of that feedback and not have been held accountable to it but definitely vulnerable." JL also shared her emotional response to the group experience. She explained, "I do not feel as much pressure on the blog and I can talk or write rather as in a group setting. I feel a little more anxiety discussing my problems face to face with other people were as on the blog it's easier for me to get a clearer answer." The following subthemes emerged from the sentiments expressed about the group experience. In some cases, the themes overlapped when the participants discussed their experiences.

Emotional Expression

Participants spoke about how the blog experience was a platform for them to express their emotions. CE reflected on how the blog a platform to express emotions. CE stated, **"**It was a platform to be able to respond. If you had some stuff that you were not able to get out you could go back, and share." Similarly DC shared, **"**I enjoyed my interactions on the blog because I like writing my feeling out. I use the written form to express my emotions and it helps me to cope with those feeling. So the blog is a great place to be able to get those feelings out and know that I am going to get feedback about them. I am very comfortable with the blog. I like the idea of having a support system at any time to be able to express how I am feeling." JL explained, **"**With my experience it is a good outlet for me to really talk about my problems. If I forget something in group it's easy for me to just hop on the blog and kind of throw a little bit more in there." When first joining the blog PM explained, **"**At first no, but when I got comfortable I was able to reach out, and blog about my feelings. I feel that the interactions were good. I commented on the individual feedback that I got from the facilitator and being able to respond back was very useful after I processed my feelings about them." Similarly TM stated, "I was able to express myself and receive feedback from some group members. I would sometimes think about group sessions after I left and write about it and get responses back which helped me process my feelings. If I need to use it during the week when something comes up that I need to process I can reach out and share." CD and JR reflected on their feeling about the emotions related to blogging and shared. According to CD "I can express myself by writing because I keep a journal, and I am used to writing out my feelings. It

helps me to detach from my feelings to bring better understanding of them to me." JR stated, "I am very comfortable with the process. I like the idea of sharing and having someone there to listen. I also like that others' have had the same emotion that I have and I am not alone."

Vulnerability

The participants shared how they experienced various levels of vulnerability on the blog. They also expressed why their vulnerability stops them from sharing on the blog. MB stated, **"**I read what everyone else writes but I don't write. I don't trust putting things in writing." CM stated, **"**I feel a little but hesitant to put stuff out there in writing for everyone to read and go back, and see. I can't speak for everyone else but for me that was how I felt. I guess I felt somewhat comfortable but not completely comfortable, because sometimes I did not want to put the wrong thing message out there. I didn't want it recorded maybe because the written work can be taken the wrong way. I rather save it for group. So that was my hesitancy I wanted to be more authentic, and more in person." CC stated, "I am not comfortable writing my feelings down for others to see. I would rather be one on one in person because I what to get my points across, and see the other person's reactions." CE stated, "No, Very comfortable at first of course I got a little bit nervous because I put myself out there with some feelings, I felt this desire or need or want to do it. I didn't feel like I would be in trouble or anything bad it was just a little vulnerable, but I wanted to do it." MB also shared, "Not very comfortable, I don't like to put stuff in writing, so no." TM stated, "At first I was not very comfortable because everyone could read what I was saying and that made me nervous."

Writing

During the interview process the participants spoke about why they write on the blog. CD realized, **"**I like the interactions that I have had on the blog because I like to write, and I like, and trust the people in my group." CM shared similar feelings, "For me it has the written word for me to remember. I like to see insight because it helped me fit relationally that is how I found out it was helpful." DC stated, "Yes, it has been beneficial, because I can write about what I am feeling. If I did not write I would bottle them up and that does not help me. I also feel supported and that is a good feeling. I have so many things happening in my life that have affected my health and being able to channel those feeling is great." JR shared, "Yes, I do think it has been beneficial, because I like to have a support system when I am feeling overwhelmed with life, and I like sharing my feelings. I like getting a response and knowing someone is there for me. I used it by going on and saying what I had to say, and waiting for the person to respond." PM stated, "I deal with many people in my own group as a sales person and being able to communicate in group, and on the blog has helped me in real life outside of the group." JL shared the ease of writing on the blog, "I am very comfortable it is very easy and it is convenient to because I get the pings on my phone. I can chime in on any discussions so it is easy."

Feedback

The participants shared how feedback affected them on the blog. They found value in self-awareness when they merged the gestalt principles into her blog interactions. BM stated, "It gave me more insight as to "oh that is how I acted or that is

how I kept quiet. So it helped me try to understand how I function. Because in the moment you might grab something but really thinking about it, but it helped me to think better. It gave me more insight. I missed that; I didn't see it that way, so it gave me a better idea of how I was viewing stuff. Why sometimes I jump to the wrong conclusions and how I am better with that, and better with not jumping, and letting it just fester, and see where this is going. As opposed to going no you are that problem, instead of accepting maybe I am just reacting to something it's just me reacting, as opposed to it just someone being mean no it's just me reacting to that high level voice or their mannerism. So the blog really helped me with a lot of that because it gave me a chance to recall and re-feel." MB stated, "I would say it has been good because I read what everyone else is writing and you can always learn from someone else's experience. It does provide an insight and a healing process so from that stand point yea." LR shared, "Yes I feel it has been beneficial because I can go back and review what the therapist said about me the good points, and the points I may need to work on." RL shared, "I liked how the facilitator would post notes so you could kind of feel what he got out of it. To see if you were on the same page, to see if you were seeing the same things that he was seeing." SM reflected on how feedback helped her to build her life skills. SM shared, "Yes, I definitely grew as a therapist in having to figure out how to provide that kind of feedback to people. I became more comfortable in addressing conflict. I became better skilled at tracking body language and interactions, and then translating that back to people as observational information not superset reaction." ST shared her feelings about how the feedback. "It helps me see what my participation was like from someone else's

view point. So I would get ST, worked on this. It meant so much to me that the facilitator

took the time. I can imagine it took a significant amount of time just write a few notes

about each person. That made me feel important and cared for but that sounds softer that

I want it to be, but cared for in a way that I have not experienced in a therapeutic setting."

CD shared, "I am very comfortable with the process because I can write and put those

feeling down on paper and know that they are shared and get feedback."

Identified Theme 2: Unfinished Dialogue

For some of the participants having access to the blog helped them to feel

connected and reach out to resolve unfinished business. CM stated, "It's been useful to

me because when I am upset I usually do write. I do journal so; this was a perfect way to

get some of my thoughts out there. It was kind of a nice bookmark so when you come to

group you could say like hay it's Monday and we don't meet until Thursday, and you

could say like this just happened. I need to put that out there and it was very helpful that

way." For LR being heard was important she stated, "I can go on any time and share

what I want concerning my feelings, and get feedback." PM also reflected by saying, "It

has been very useful because I have access to someone all the time and if I direct a post

to a particular person they get back to me."

Connected

Being able to connect to other members and continue with their unfinished

dialogue was also a factor for group members.

CD reflected on being connected and stated, "I feel like the blog is an extension of the

group therapy. I can continue my talking on the blog and work more out than just waiting

for the next session. I use the blog for unfinished business by using it after session if I need to finish a feeling that lingers. For example, I was talking about something and while I was driving home I kept thinking about it. The feeling stayed because I was not done all the way, so I got home, and started writing, and it made me feel better." According to CE, "Well I would write a comment of something I did not get a chance to say in group." CM stated, "Once or twice I used it for follow-up. Sometimes because obviously session has to end there might be a thought that popped up later. I know once or twice I know I went home and maybe something that was trigger for me, and I would use it instead of having to wait a whole week." In the online group blog being connected can manifest in various ways. JR stated, "I use the blog sometimes if I have not finished a thought in group. I will continue it on the blog. The only problem is I have to wait for a response and that sometimes makes me anxious. Then I think about how I am feeling anxious and why which leads to me understanding more about me." LR responded by saying, "Sometimes I use the blog if I have not processed everything I need to process during group sessions." RL stated, "I used it by going on and saying what I had to say, and waiting for the person to respond."

Interactions

How the interactions on the blog helped participants continue their process from group. SM reflected, "I can think of a specific incident when I had a conflict with a group member and I used the blog to set up dialogue so that we could talk about how we would resolve it in the group." RL stated, "It was very useful because I could say what I would have said there, and finish out anything that I needed to say, because sometimes you did

not get a chance to talk in group so it is good to be able to have your voice there even though the time was over."

Identified Themes 3.Perceived Levels of Psychological Wellbeing

The study participants' responses to how there psychological wellbeing increased due to their interactions on the blog by being supported, stepping out of their comfort zone, and gaining deeper knowledge of themselves through feedback, and awareness.

Supported

Participants spoke about how they felt supported by the facilitators and other group members. CD said, "Yes, I do feel support on the blog because I can get a response, and I can see what the facilitator felt about my interactions in group which is helpful." CE said, "Yes, because our group leader I see him personally so he was able to have some insight, and reflection on the work that I need to do. If I was doing something in the group and like if I stepped outside of my comfort zone he would say I was very impressed in how you bla, bla, bla." CM stated, "Yes sometimes I felt supported and it was because they replied back, and literally stating their support."
DC stated, "Yes, I do feel supported with my personal work because the people, and the blog help me to understand that I am not along, and that I can change how I view things, and react. It has been important for me that I grow in many ways. I can see that growth in me in many ways. I often tell myself that if that had been me years ago I would have reacted differently." JL "Yes I do, because I feel supported on the blog, because every time I post something or write something I get a response. It may not be immediate but I get constructive feedback. My facilitator does a really good job of telling me what I did

in the group setting and what I did not do and it works for me." JR stated, "I feel

supported by a few people because not everyone blogs. Those that do blog help me to

feel cared for." LR stated, "Yes, I feel supported on the blog, because it is about me, and

others, and we help each other with our work." PM stated, "Yes, I feel supported because

I can reach out, and get feedback, and support when I need it." RL stated, "Yes, I think so

I felt important, and if I had a question it was addressed. The facilitator always monitored

the blog so or whoever was therapist monitoring the blog I knew someone was reading it.

SM stated, "Sometimes I felt supported. Sometimes I felt support from the person

supervising my writing sometimes. They would read it and tell me how to phrase things

differently. By the group members often they would tell me what they appreciated about

the feedback or what different ways they wanted to hear the feedback and that was very

supportive as well. TM stated, "Yes, I feel supported on the blog, because there are some

members that support me by responding when I post, and I know that the facilitator will

respond also."

Affects Over Time

Participants spoke about the different ways the blog interactions affected them

over time. BM stated, "It helped me better process to understand what I was really

dealing with."CD stated, "The blog helps me because I can read what others think, and

feel and make changes if I choose to." CM stated, "Well I think it helped because it was

another tool along with group. And again since I like the written word it kind of helps me

go back, and remember. There were times I say some time back in march, whatever year

let me go find that, that's how it would be helpful." JL responded, "It has just allowed me

to be a little more open which ultimately lead to me finding a solution to my problems. I am not concealed I am not hiding anything."JR said, "The blog helps me to release and that helps my well-being." LR said, "It helps me feel like I am not alone and that helps me with my feeling part of something, and cares for. The people in my group help me by supporting me when I feel sad. That helps me to move past the sadness in the moment." PM stated, "It has affected my psychological well-being because I know I can get honest feedback from people. I am not alone in my feelings and it makes me feel safe."
RL reflected, "It helped me deal with some things in daily life that you don't deal with or that I would have avoided. So it gave me the opportunity to continue to deal with things that you would typically avoid and not cast out. And there were other people also that wanted to grow so that was beneficial." SM stated, "I do think that writing that kind of a blog has helped me feel more confident in dealing with reactions and responses. It also made me more willing to make an effort to providing feedback to others, now I am teaching young people how to give feedback to others in meaningful ways."

Identified theme 4: Beneficial and Non-Beneficial

For many of the participants, there were beneficial and non-beneficial aspects of the blog in improving, and implementing skills learned during group sessions. CM shared, "For me part of it was accepting what is being said without being defensive if something was being said about you just trying to be respect of each other's point of view." CC stated, "The blog has been beneficial in the sense that I read the post for the group session, recap, and see what the facilitator has to say." BM shared, "Beneficial because I could revisit the past, where as you in the moment trying to revisit the past you

sometimes too much gets bombarded. Here you can sit quietly and be it and reflect and there are no other people in the room. So for me if I was embarrassed or upset nobody else could see it. So I could be more in me and find out why am I acting this way why did I this bother me or why did it make me happy which ever." DC stated, "It has been beneficial because I can look back and reflect on how I used to react, and how I react now." The subtheme that developed from the beneficial and non-beneficial is the way the participants work on self was enhanced by the experience.

Enhances Work

Participants shared how useful the blog interactions were in enhancing their growth as gestalt group members. JL shared, "I always address what is going on with me, for example if I feel anxiety I try to identify where the anxiety came from what did I do to influence it. It just goes along with Gestalt. I constantly try to figure out what role I play in the anxiety that I am feeling." JR stated, "I try to stay in the moment when posting and not go back. I try to stay aware of what I am feeling and why. I try to take in information without getting upset. I express what I am feeling in a way that tells others where I am feeling the discomfort and how. It has been beneficial because it helped me to put a name to what I am feeling and get support from those that have similar feeling." LR stated, "I try to stay in the moment with my feelings and try to be aware of my feelings. Writing gives me the time to think and identify those feelings in private. It has been beneficial in understanding my feeling and where they are coming from when I am writing because I am able to detach the emotions, and get peaceful release." PM shared, "It is kind of like I try to be open when reading and writing, and try to stay in the moment

with my feelings." CD reflected, "The blog has been very beneficial because I have a

reference to look back at see how far I have come in my personal work. The notes help

me to get a better understanding to how I have changed over time. Having the feedback

from others that I can read has been very helpful. I notice the changes in myself as I look

back at my responses and writing on the blog." CE stated, "It has been beneficial because

it is a platform in writing that you can go back, and look at as many times as you want so

it helps the process sink in deeper. It's completely; beneficial in raising awareness." CM

shared, "For me it was beneficial because there was this key learning moments that I

would pick up on, because it was written down, and I was more likely to remember. I

could go back and refer to it. And some of the observation made by the facilitators would

key me into something that I was not aware of at the time, because it maybe was not

spoken in group. That was really great I think it really speed things along. I think a great

example was when the facilitator brought up one time how he noticed how when I

uncomfortable I would look down and I would speak and soothing triggered in me to all

week long I thought about it so for me it was very beneficial. I had me think about why I

would bow my head sometimes. Yes very beneficial." TM reflected, "It has been very

beneficial, because I can look at the postings from the blog, and see what changes I want

to make within myself, because maybe I did not notice them before." BM said, "It gave

me because I go back so much; it gave me more of an insight because sometimes things

go over my head in the moment in group so I able to now process better. For me the blog

is important for me to be able to process stuff." CC stated, "The group notes are

beneficial because I can see what was written about me and see if I can work on myself

with the information." DC shared, "It has been very beneficial in raising awareness of myself because it is in writing. I can see how I was feeling and the group notes help me to see what I do, and how I can fix it if I choose, and not if I am happy with being who I am." JL stated, "It has been beneficial in raising awareness of myself because somethings I don't even realize myself when I am going through, so when I am actually writing it out I can actually reflect on it like this is genuine opposed to making something up. I think that on an online blog it is easier for me to give everything that I need to give for my own development."

Communication

Communication on the blog is vital to the online blog experience for the gestalt members. The participants shared how they use the platform to communicate in a meaningful way that enhances their development. CE said, "I just used the philosophy of how we are learning to communicate. I tried to translate that into my writing, like expressing myself in the way I am learning in the gestalt method or theory." JL said, "It has been extremely beneficial because whatever I don't get to say in group I can always say in the blog, so I never feel like oh I did not get to say this. Or maybe my problems won't get fixed because I did not mention this in the group. I feel like I am in a constant state of being open and I can give my problems, and a solution will be found. Opposed to leaving things out or not addressing things that maybe really important." ST shared, "No chit chat, no unnecessary words. Speak from your own experience so I can sum that up as no chit chat." TM said, "I try to pay attention to how I am feeling in the moment when I am writing. I try to take in what is being said without becoming defensive or thinking that

it is an attack on me and understanding that it is just on other person's feelings." JR

shared, "It has been beneficial because it has helped me to channel my feelings better by

writing them down." MB said, "I think reading someone else's story is food for thought

so it would cause me to alter a thought process and make me rethink before I respond to

someone." SM relayed, "I would say early in the process I think it made me over think

and I would get caught up in stuff I wanted to say, and worrying about wanting to say it

right and eventually I got sick of that, and went through it, and got better, and being clear

about how I wanted to communicate. Then again it has helped in clarifying the position

of therapist in giving feedback so that the feel is to the purpose in that work that I am

doing with a client."

Why Blog?

In the final question all of the participants spoke about why the blog was

beneficial to them and if they would or would not recommend the blog.

BM "For me yes it is very beneficial as a supplement, I don't know if others people

would find it beneficial. I would say give it time just try to bear with it, I understand the

need for the blog. I know for me I would not want therapy that way. For me I want more

face to face and this was backing up my face to face time. Yes, it was totally beneficial,

but it took a while for me to get used to it. Definitely I know I talked to my son about it

and he was like I don't think I want other people to know, and I totally got that but for me

it was if you can trust the people in the room because they don't know your last name

they don't know where you live so it's ok . So the safety of it and that's something that if

you are uncomfortable with helped you realize that you were uncomfortable with it, and

ok let's deal with it now. And the whole point of the blog was this is what it is in Gestalt this is what it is now let's just go with it. And what can we learn from it each of us in our own way. I find it so challenging and I recommend it to anybody." CC said, "I would suggest it to others because they might benefit from it." CD stated, "Yes I would suggest the blog as long as it is a part of the group therapy. I do not see it being separate because I need that interaction in person." CE said, "I definitely would because again it is a way to be able to go back, process more, go back, reflect, and process."

CM stated, "Yes, absolutely I see it going hand and hand. The benefit now since I don't have the blog. It is a tool and I see it as a way to express after thoughts, feelings, and to explore new ideas. Just for some people it's nice to have. I think it's a very beneficial tool. It can be a safe place. I mean I had not experienced it to not be a safe place. I imagine that it could happen but I am sure that that is not tolerated by the moderator." DC stated, "Yes, I would suggest it to others if I felt that they could benefit from it. Everyone may not be like my and be as open with expressing themselves in writing. I guess for those that are not open it may be able to help them to open up I don't know. I just know it helps me." JL stated, "100 percent, like I said before it's awesome, because whatever I don't get to address in the group setting I can put on the blog. I think that would help anyone because we all want to talk and we all want our problems to be heard. What better way than to share with people that you are already talking to, so you are already comfortable with them. And they also can share their problems so you can give your input. I think that we are all a part of each other's development. I think it is beneficial and I would recommend it." LR said, "Yes, I would because it is a good supplement to

therapy, because I can be in contact with someone all the time." PM stated, "Yes, I would because you get more than just group therapy you get an access all the time to a support system." RL stated, "Yes, I absolutely would suggest it as a supplement. I think that it gives you more bang for your buck being that your therapy just doesn't stop the moment you walk out the door. It gives you a chance to continue working on yourself throughout the week, based upon feedback from the therapist and others." SM stated, "For adults I think it has had a lot of benefits in giving more space and time to process emotions" ST stated, "I would definitely suggest it as a supplement to therapy but not in place of therapy. While I don't know that it would be beneficial to everyone people for who it is beneficial it's very beneficial." TM stated, "Yes, I would because it is a way to get feedback, and give feedback, and get a better understanding of myself. It also helps to be able to reach out to others and know that I will be supported."

Thematic Summary

The participants in the study revealed their perceptions of the benefits of the gestalt online group blog. The participants expressed in their own words the value that they believed came from their participation on the blog. However, in the evaluation of the findings, while interpreting the meaning of the statements, all of the participants who actively participated found the experience beneficial. The participants', who chose not to participate, found little value in the process. A query of the data showed there were more beneficial perceptions than non-beneficial statements. The statement given by ST sums up most of the shared experience by stating, "I would definitely suggest it as a

supplement to therapy but not in place of therapy. While I don't know that it would be beneficial to everyone people for who it is beneficial it's very beneficial."

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of group member support received in the online environment and the opportunity that they were afforded to experiment with feedback to gain awareness of self via the use of blogging on an online environment. Chapter 4 contained an introduction, setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary. My findings show how five men and ten women who participated in this study described their experience of taking part in an online blog that was used as a supplement to gestalt group therapy. The research questions and interview questions created a guideline that helped the participants describe and explore their common phenomenon. In this study, the participants answered the research question: What is the lived experience of individuals who are participating in gestalt group therapy with the added benefit of online group notes?

The group experience was the first overarching theme that presented itself from the participants' statements. Participants expressed how the blog experience was a platform for them to express their emotions. The participants shared how they experienced various levels of vulnerability on the blog. During the interview process the participants expressed why they write on the blog. The participants shared how feedback beneficially affected them. The participants spoke of value in self-awareness when they merged the gestalt principles into her blog interactions. For some of the participants

having access to the blog helped them to feel connected and reach out to resolve

unfinished business. The participants responses varied due to their individuality. Some

participants stated that they did not actively participate in the blog writing while others

were active in writing and supporting others who wrote on the blog. The themes

presented themselves from the responses of the individuals who actively took part in

writing and from those that were not as active. Actively participating and non-actively

writing participants' benefited according to the narratives' in some ways.

Chapter 5 includes the introduction, an interpretation of findings, the limitations

of the study, recommendations, implications, and the conclusion of the chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

I examined the perceptions of the lived experience of gestalt group members who had access to group notes through online secure social networks. My goal was to gain an understanding of the support and benefits received by taking part in the online supplemental blog for gestalt group members. The conceptual framework used in this study was the paradoxical theory of change. The paradoxical theory of change is not to change who a person is, but for the person to embrace all aspects of their experience by expanding awareness of the occurrence and becoming more engaged in the encounter (Beisser, 1970). Goals met are not measured but help an individual to gain additional understanding of self and the environment (Yontef, & Schulz, 2016). The concept of the paradoxical theory of change aided in understanding how aware the participants were of their experience of the online blog's effects in relation to support.

Chapter 5 consists of a review of previous chapters. The chapter provides of an interpretation of findings and how the results relate to the theoretical framework used for this study. The limitations of the study are discussed followed by recommendations for further research and, then by the implications that the study for positive social change. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the overall study.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the potential benefits of using an interactive online environment (i.e., secured blog) for gestalt group members and facilitators to provide feedback and support as a supplement to gestalt group session. Their subjective experiences were solicited to gain a better understanding of their involvement in interacting with others in a supplemental online

group environment. The themes that emerged in this study are group experience, unfinished dialogue, perceived levels of psychological wellbeing, and the perceived benefit or non-benefit of the online experience.

Interpretation of the Findings

For this study, 15 participants volunteered and were identified as gestalt group members who took part in the interactive online environment. The study participants' immediate perception and descriptions of their experiences were collected to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon. During this exploration, my focus was on the participants' awareness of their experiences, sensations, feelings, thoughts, and situations to give equal weight to each of their descriptions using a phenomenological qualitative approach.

I found that the participants who regularly engaged in the interactions on the blog had similar experiences. Participants who actively engaged on the blog found that they were able to express themselves and relay their thoughts, and emotions when needed. They spoke of appreciating the support that was received and being able to reciprocate that support to others on the blog. The participants also expressed an appreciation knowing that others on the blog shared similar emotions so they felt less alone. Invoking emotions and understanding the changes is a fundamental part of working with emotional difficulties (Lane, et al., 2015). This confirms research by Raines and Keating (2011) who explored health blogging, social support, and psychosocial well-being and relationship between them in the social dimension of health-related blogging. They found that health blogs are a way people make connections and form ties that garner support to

enhance their psychosocial well-being. This study confirms and extends knowledge found in the research of Raines and Keating (2011), blogging is a beneficial way to generate online support when individuals experience emotions such as anxiety, and uncertainty in their everyday experiences.

Some participants in this study expressed there was value in being able to write about their feelings as a form of expression as opposed to restraining those emotions. The findings confirm and extend research by Canada, et al. (2015) said that journaling has a long history of being used in therapeutic settings. Journaling can be used as a vehicle for self-reflection and examination. It is a tool used by therapists for clients to tell stories that are important to them.

Some of the study participants expressed how they use the blog platform to communicate in a meaningful way that enhances their development. This finding confirms research that the journaling tool is a supplement to face-to-face therapy because of the limited time that is spent in therapy (Canada et al., 2015). Participant JL said, "It has been extremely beneficial because whatever I don't get to say in group I can always say in the blog, so I never feel like oh I did not get to say this. Or maybe my problems won't get fixed because I did not mention this in the group. I feel like I am in a constant state of being open and I can give my problems, and a solution will be found. Opposed to leaving things out or not addressing things that maybe really important." In their study, Canada et al. (2015) examined the use of journaling for veterans that were incarcerated. The results of the study found that journaling was beneficial in improving communication, improving insight, and in skill building of self-reflection (Canada et al.,

2015). The themes extend knowledge of how the members of gestalt group therapy with the benefit of online blogs as a supplement to group therapy was beneficial in improving the group experience by opening lines of communication, affecting personal insight, and helping to improve self-reflection skills. In addition to the previous benefits listed journaling can aid in the maintenance of progress, developing new insight, and in reflection of information from sessions.

Those participants who refrained from participating actively shared similar stories. The participants' responses were that they did not feel comfortable writing out their feelings for others to view. Several participants stated that did not feel comfortable putting thing in writing because it could be misunderstood. Some participants preferred their interactions to be in person. The feelings of vulnerability and preferences for in-person interactions appeared to hinder blog interactions.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was the paradoxical theory of change to investigate the lived experiences of how group members embraced all aspects of the experience, by expanding awareness of the occurrence and becoming more engaged in the encounter. The goal was to demonstrate how gestalt group participants described their lived experience of interacting online with group notes. The paradoxical theory of change related to the research because it showed how group members expanded their awareness of their experience to gain better understanding of their interactions. They described how the blog experience aided them in gaining awareness of their feelings of the experience. The participants described how they experienced unfinished dialogue from group

sessions via online group notes and blogging. They identified how they transitioned from a group setting to an online blog setting to express their feelings. The participants described their perceived increased levels of psychological well-being over time. The participants gave examples of how the experience was beneficial or non-beneficial in raising awareness of self and their environment. The participants responses to the inquiries helped to identify how aware participants were of the benefits if any to interacting in the online environment.

Limitations of the Study

To aid in establishing trustworthiness, I acknowledge that there were several limitations to this study, including that lack of peer-reviewed articles or studies associated with the specific subject matter. The lack of prior peer reviewed articles limited the guidelines and references that could be used to compare and contrast findings. There is also a potential problem with the use of the phenomenological qualitative design which relies on the participants telling their story of their lived experience. I had to rely on the participants' memories and some of the participants had not been in a group setting with a supplemental online blog for over a year. This required the participants to remember how they felt about their interaction in the past. The participants appeared to be able to remember how they felt about their involvement and recall that information. The implication of this limitation is my inability to confirm the accuracy of the statements made by the participants. The use of open-ended questions allowed the participants to tell their story and change or elaborate on their ideas.

Another possible limitation of the study was bias. The interviews were transcribed to eliminate bias in the study. After the transcription was complete, a copy was forwarded to each participant for review and verification. This process ensured that the personal bias of the interviewer was eliminated.

Recommendations

The recommendations for future research are based on the strengths and weaknesses of this study and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the potential benefit of using an interactive online environment (i.e., secured blog) for gestalt group members and facilitators to provide feedback, and support as a supplement to gestalt group session. During the process of the study the interviewer found that there were positive and negative views of the interactive blog experience. The majority of the participants were optimistic about their experience due to their willingness to engage in the process and work thru their initial discomfort. It was found that the participants who were less optimistic about the blog experience were unwilling to participate due to feelings of vulnerability in exposing their feeling in writing and preferring face to face contact. The one common agreement between both active and inactive participants of the blog was that they both utilized the feedback that was presented by the facilitator of the group in the blog to enhance their therapeutic experience. Another benefit that was perceived by many of the blog members was a feeling of support by the members of the blog. This could lead one to speculate that this would be the outcome for the group members who participate in online therapeutic blogs as a supplement to group.

Further research may look into the positive and negative differences between specific age groups who participate in online gestalt blogs in addition to therapy. Future research may make use of a longitudinal study in order to capture awareness of emotions from the beginning of participation to the transitional stages of the members on the blog. Future research may make use of a quantitative study to evaluate the value of the supplemental blog. Lastly, future research may also consider the benefits of the accessibility gestalt e-mental health delivery.

Implications

Positive Social Change

In today's society, many people engage in internet delivered activities. One implication of this study is that the use of supplemental blogs where individuals receive support, feedback, and the opportunity to express feelings 24 hours a day may be an option for some therapy. Wallin et al. (2016) suggested that a mix of online interaction and face-to-face treatment may provide optimal benefits for patient care. According to Boyd (2015), studies show how social media is a supplement to face-to-face contact and plays an important role in many people's lives. Raines and Keating (2011) explored health blogging, social support, and psychosocial well-being and the relationship among them in the social dimension of health-related blogging. Health blogs are a way people make connections and form ties that garner support in order to enhance their psychosocial well-being. This study confirmed that the online supplemental blog played a beneficial role in some of the participants' lives. Some of the participants expressed that they forms relationships on the blog that helped them with their psycho-social well-being. The

ability to express emotions in a secure safe environment was released through the stories that the participant told.

Methodological Implications

The methodological implications of the knowledge gained from the findings of this study contributed to the literature. This study provided information about a beneficial platform that can be utilized by therapists to enhance the delivery of treatment in a group therapy environment for the benefit of their clients. The study participants shared their experiences of the overall benefit of participation on the online supplemental blog and how it helped to provide emotional and therapeutic support to the treatment they were receiving. The support helped the participants by transferring beneficial skills to their social interactions and ways of thinking. It is important to understand the process and how it benefits the clients to initiate social change in how mental health care interventions are delivered. In order to achieve beneficial results therapists would have to be trained in the process of facilitating an online secure blog in order to optimize the participants' experience. The blog would have to be monitored by the facilitator. The facilitator would need an understanding of gestalt therapy. The facilitator would need to be trained in how to write the group notes to translate meaning and goals to the participants.

According to Novotney (2014), self-expression in the form of writing such as blogging is a beneficial form of communication which offers added psychological benefits such as reduced social anxiety and improved self-esteem. An understanding of the experience of an individual who uses online mental health platforms is important

when developing resources for the online environment such as blogs and online group

notes (Fergie, Hunt, & Hilton, 2016). Online-based mental health blogs may have the

ability to address some unmet needs of mental health care (Moock, 2014). Mental health

group therapy with added benefits of online group notes as a form of feedback and

reinforcement of interventions appears to have provided beneficial effects.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework that guided this study was the paradoxical theory of

change which suggests that group members should embrace all aspects of the experience,

by expanding awareness of the lived experience and how it affected their lives. Several

participants defined how they felt the experience helped them to be able to communicate

openly due to the support that they received. Many of the participants agreed that the

feedback that they received during their time on the blog helped them to learn more about

themselves from the awareness of others. It endorses the component of embracing all

aspects of the experience by expanding awareness. The paradoxical theory of change was

applicable to this study, confirming that the participants, continued to work on their

levels of awareness with communications that they received on the blog and how it

affected them.

Recommendations for Practice

One recommendation for further studies is expanding the research into other

methods of group therapy such as cognitive behavioral therapy where online blogs are

used as a supplement to face-to-face therapy. A second recommendation would be to

compare and contrast group therapy participants who use online supplemental blogs with

those that do not. The third and final recommendation would be a study that would compare active participants on the supplemental blogs with inactive participant to determine if there is a significant difference in the progression of their therapeutic experience.

Conclusion

I set out to understand the phenomenon of the psychological effects of the gestalt supplemental online blog. Gaps in the literature were identified such as the need for support systems, expressing emotions, psychological wellbeing, and the ability to communicate. I highlighted past literature to include social media, online mental health therapy, health blogging, social support, and psychosocial well-being. I also included past theoretical frameworks of gestalt theory and practice to support this research.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the potential benefit of using an interactive online environment (i.e., secured blog) for gestalt group members and facilitators to provide feedback, and support as a supplement to gestalt group session. My findings suggest that the interactive online supplemental blog has the ability to positively provide support, and enhance the group therapeutic experience. The participants expressed an appreciation for having a place to express their emotions. They appreciated having a place to be able to respond to group related issues after group sessions. The participants expressed the importance of receiving individual feedback from the facilitator and being able to respond to that feedback. The participants were able to use the blog to detach from their feelings to gain a better self-understanding. The participants found it beneficial to be able to reach out through the blog, interact with

others, and share their feelings and reactions after sessions. The participants expressed

value of having a support system when feelings became overwhelming in life. Finally,

the results of this study contributed in identifying some benefits of online-based mental

health blogs and their ability to address some unmet needs of mental health care. My

expectations are that the findings will encourage other researchers to expand on this

investigation of the benefits of the use of online tools in metal health therapy.

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Appendix A:Interview Questions

An Examination of the Gestalt Group Process Using the Online Group Environment: A

Qualitative Study

Date:_____

Interview questions based on the research study questions:

1. In your experience how do you feel about your interactions within the online

   group note blog?

2. Do you feel that the online group note blog has been beneficial to your therapeutic

   experience and how?

3. Have you ever been a part of a therapy blog and what kind?

4. Have you ever taken part in a Gestalt group therapy blog before and how

   comfortable are you with the process?

5. In what way do you use the blog for unfinished dialogue from group sessions?

6. In what way has the blog been useful in expressing feelings when you are not in

   group sessions?

7. Do you feel supported on the blog with your personal work and how?

8. How has the blog affected your psychological well-being over time?

9. How do you translate the Gestalt process group to the online environment in the

   blog entries that you post?

10. How has the blog been beneficial or non-beneficial in changes that you have

    made?

11. How has the online group note experience beneficial or non-beneficial in raising awareness of your-self?

12. Would you suggest the online blog experience to others as a supplement to therapy and why or why not.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in Research Study

My name is Montrea Arndt-Verlander and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research to fulfill the requirements of my degree. I am inviting you to participate in a study for my doctorial research study entitled "An Examination of the Gestalt Group Process Using the Online Group Environment." If you agree to participate in the study you will be asked 12 semi-structured questions with possible follow-up questions to clarify or to seek out additional information. The interview should last approximately 45 minutes.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of individuals who take part in online secured Gestalt blogs as a supplement to therapy. Your in-depth responses can contribute to the possibility of improving mental health care services through the Internet. Once this dissertation is approved by Walden University you will be provided with a copy of the manuscript.

The interview session will be recorded and you will have the opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and to provide comments regarding accuracy. The data collected during the interview session will only be used for the purposes of this study. Your identity and responses to interview questions will be kept confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study please respond via email to montrea.arndt-verlander@waldenu.edu or you can contact me by phone (856-229-4900) if you have any questions about this study.

Best regards,

Montrea Arndt-Verlander, Ph.D. Candidate

Walden University

Appendix C: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about the lived experience of

Gestalt group members who have access to group notes through online secure social

networks. The researcher is inviting Gestalt group members who participate in online

blogs as a supplement to therapy to be in the study. This form is part of a process called

"informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take

part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Montrea Arndt-Verlander, who

is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of group members who have access to group notes through online secure social networks. The lived experience approach explores the stories of the participants to gain understanding of their experience. The qualitative methods focus on the participants telling of their experience. 12 Semi-structured open-ended questions will be utilized. The data that is collected will be confidential to protect the subject's identity. Participant will have 7 days to review the study information and ask questions before giving consent.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Answer 12 semi-structured questions with possible follow-up questions to clarify or to seek out additional information.
- Participate for approximately 45 minute minimum.
- The interview will be recorded.

Here are some sample questions
- Do you feel supported on the blog with your personal work and how?
- How has the blog affected your psychological well-being over time?
- How do you translate the Gestalt process group to the online environment in the blog entries that you post?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. Your participation will be kept confidential. No one at Integrated Therapy Center will know if you are participating in the study including the therapists at the center. No one at Integrated Therapy Center will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If

you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study may involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress or fatigue. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. The findings will add to the existing literature in order to understand beneficial and non-beneficial aspects of the online group experience.

In case of distress due to the study the following organizations do provide no to low cost therapy.

Depression hotline (630) 482-9696

Crisis Call Center (775-784-8090 or text answer to 839863

Integrated Therapy Center 108 Fairway Terrace Mt. Laurel, NJ 08054 (856)787-7150

Payment:

There will be no reimbursement for participation in this study.

Privacy:

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by password protections, data encryption, code names, key locked drawer. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email to montrea.arndt-verlander@waldenu.edu or you can contact me by phone (856-229-4900) if you have any questions about this study. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

When consent is done via e-mail, use: Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by signing below if face to face or when consent is obtained via e-mail, use: replying to this email with the words, "I consent."

Printed Name of Participant

_____

Date of consent   _____

Participant's Signature   _____

Researcher's Signature   _____

                                         _____

Appendix D: Field Test

This questionnaire is being submitted to you for your feedback for a field test of interview questions related to a qualitative dissertation study. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

Feed-back questions.

1. Is the interview schedule too long? (If yes, what would you suggest be dropped?)

2. Is the wording clear and unambiguous? (If not, please note directions of words that are unclear.)

3. Is the format conducive to ease of response?

4. Do some of the questions need to be rephrased or dropped?

5. Are there additional questions that I should ask? (If yes, which questions would you suggest?)

Appendix E: IRB Approval to Collect Data

Dear Ms. Arndt-Verlander,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "An Examination of the Gestalt Group Process Using the Online Group Environment."

Your approval # is 02-14-19-0276270. You will need to reference this number in your dissertation and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on February 13th, 2020. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application document that has been submitted as of this date. This includes maintaining your current status with the university. Your IRB approval is only valid while you are an actively enrolled student at Walden University. If you need to take a leave of absence or are otherwise unable to remain actively enrolled, your IRB approval is suspended. Absolutely NO participant recruitment or data collection may occur while a student is not actively enrolled.

If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the Documents & FAQs section of the Walden web site: http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec

Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period of time they retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d

Congratulations!
Bryn Saunders
Research Ethics Support Specialist
Office of Research Ethics and Compliance
Email: irb@mail.waldenu.edu
Phone: (612-)312-1336
Fax: (626-)605-0472

Walden University
100 Washington Ave. S, Suite 900
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this
link: http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec