

# Applying LBT in Group Settings

Barbara Piozzini

**Abstract:** This study is to show how the Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) method can be applied to groups in an attempt to point out possible risks and benefits of its application related to a group context. From observation and analysis a single practical case has been outlined, taking into consideration influence of group dynamics on the counselees' cognitive processes during the LBT session. Judging from the analysis of the outlined results, it seems that *intersubjectivity* can play an important role if considered as a productive resource in the co-construction of a changing process among LBT group members during the application of its six steps. In particular, new research fields on the need to analyze LBT in groups have been opened, exploiting the possibility to consider the group as an autonomous entity, especially in long term counseling therapies.

## LBT METHOD APPLIED TO GROUPS

### *Background*

Logic Based Therapy is a philosophical counseling method that stems from the observation of one's thoughts, pointing out an intentional interrelated object of an emotion with its rating to thus work on fallacious reasoning, eventually developing a new appropriate behavior. Its main focus is, philosophically speaking, trying to change a *vice* into its opposite *virtue*.

### *Methods and Setting*

This method has been studied and, for the first time, applied to a small group of five people, once a week for one month. During this study period, no quantitative survey devices were employed, only observation and rewriting of cognitive processes for a qualitative analysis were used. As it was a group and not single individuals, counselees, who wished to develop a new way to change their perspectives of life, were first presented with an overview of the main tenets of the LBT philosophical theory.

Aristotle was the first to have spoken about different types of propositions and syllogisms.<sup>1</sup> Starting from Aristotle's theory considering propositions to be sen-

tences, that is, mental acts through which we unify or divide concepts according to a “subject and verb” structure, it was possible to illustrate how they can be mainly distinguished in *quantity/quality*, *affirmative/negative*, *universal and particular* types after having provided some examples.<sup>2</sup> From the aforementioned relationships, we then progressed to the introduction of syllogisms. A syllogism is, therefore, the link gathering different types of prepositions which allow us to switch from some premises to a conclusion through inferences (e.g. if A then B; A; therefore B).<sup>3</sup> “If you believe that all humans are mortal, and Socrates is human, could you avoid the conclusion that Socrates is mortal? Deduced from the premise the conclusion would be inescapable.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, asserting a difference between the validity of the inferential process and the truth of the premises, the main LBT assumption of deducing self-destructive conclusions as the result of fallacious logic (as a deduction from premises), was a necessary step to disclose.

As LBT helps people to identify the reasoning involved in negative emotions and helps them to identify an irrational premise in such reasoning,<sup>5</sup> it was necessary to briefly outline the difference, speaking about emotions, between a prescriptive rating component that includes a positive or negative rating dimension and an intentional object of the emotion that is the object to which the emotion refers. For example, anger refers to an action and includes a negative rating of the person who performs it.<sup>6</sup> Reading some Internet posts advertised on the Web was a good way to discuss this point, to get used to analyzing one’s reasoning and acted as the means by which we approached the more practical side. An example from a web post showed how one can cope with reasoning blaming one’s emotion on someone/ something else without taking responsibility for one’s emotion. That was the example of C, who writes in a post that her husband was driving her crazy because of his jealousy and she could not stop getting angry each time because of this.

During the first practical session and after having recognized the specific case of a *Can’t help* situation, we tried to replace the language with a self-empowering sentence. Changing the *I can’t* sentence into an active *I won’t change my behavior* is a good way to stress the possibility to enhance human potential, as the LBT method teaches.

The opposite situation would lead us to experiment with the so-called *dormitive* <sup>7</sup> principles leading to a stagnant and, maybe, standard behavior without enhancing the possibility to freely act on mental processes. In addition, these pre-

liminary exercises in group supported the hypothesis that, in some cases, when a counselee is first introduced to the LBT method, the resistance to disclose personal information can be slightly reduced compared to subjects who know nothing about the consultant's method. From a methodological perspective, the decision regarding how to proceed within the group was established from a context analysis, observing human reactions and behavior, a guideline that established a practical approach in group therapy consistent with LBT.

### A PRACTICAL CASE EXPERIENCE IN GROUP

The hypothesis of a corresponding intersubjective bond between the examples provided and the counselees was confirmed by the rapidity of interventions and the introspective alertness observed. During the practical experience other examples taken from sessions of private philosophical counseling cases were also introduced. On the basis of questions that participants asked in relation to the method, the difference between a psychological and philosophical approach was then discussed, introducing the relevant aspects of each method. After having read emotive statements taken from the Web, one of the participants objected to the possibility of observing one's thoughts in real life. That was a good way to overcome the emotive *impasse* among the members of the group and among counselees and myself.

One of the participants stated:

**P:** For instance, if I am married and I don't want to go on with my husband there are some instances in which it is not possible to stop because of matters of practical daily life. I am sad about that but I can't do anything to change my situation.

**Consultant:** If I understand you correctly, you are married but you can't divorce because of some reasons. Could we know what those reasons are?

**P:** Yes, I don't have enough money to cope with my life and there is an etiquette to respect. If I divorce it would be a pity for my family who would suffer a lot. How can I find a remedy? It is not possible.

**C:** Let's first start by answering how Merleau Ponty would approach the matter. Is that the real question? First of all I'd like to say that finding a remedy here does not imply wondering how to obtain a divorce. Let's take one step back. Let's follow the reasoning first and try to understand which emotions are present, the rating and then the fallacies; maybe, the solution is not the one you are thinking of right now. We don't know yet.

P: (...) The counselee went on to discuss her situation and emotions with the rating coming to light

C: If I understand you correctly, you feel depressed because you don't get along well with your husband but you can't divorce. Is that right? (...)

P: Well, I suffer because of my husband's behavior but I can't stand going elsewhere and there is a money problem too.

At this point, the intervention of a group member helped the counselee to identify her fallacy.

C: Yes that's the point; your mate recognized it well, you are also demanding that someone else make you happy; it seems that you can't but maybe you do not want to. I will add one more thing; tell me if I understand it correctly (on the basis of another counselee's reasoning I do not report here for brevity sake): you are feeling guilty because if you divorce, other members of your family will suffer.

P: Yes, that's true

C: The reasoning is the following: if I leave my husband, my family will suffer so that, in order not to make them suffer, I have to stay with my husband. If I don't do that it is awful and I feel guilty and bad. Is that right?

P: Yes.

C: So, let's try and think that you are not divorcing. Is it true that if you are with your partner your family will be happy?

R: No, it is not true at all. (...)

C: How can we overcome this?

P: I don't know, it is impossible to change now and leave my husband.(...)

The dialogue went on following the steps of Logic Based Therapy. A case of *can'tstipation* was outlined where the guiding virtues to be developed were temperance and authenticity. As Aristotle would advice, giving yourself some behavioral assignments, including going in the opposite direction you are heading, is a good way to strengthen your willpower.

During this session, it was not possible to set up a life plan aimed at developing the highlighted virtues because of interventions from other group members

and because of the time allowed for the session, which was fixed at an hour and a half. Therefore, we agreed to set up a plan during later sessions. The conclusion of this session was not one of wondering how to obtain a divorce but of aiming at an awareness level of the reasoning behind the emotion, redirecting it in order to identify an inherent willpower that can be used to overcome fallacies, and aiming at a virtuous goal.<sup>8</sup>

From the outset, other counselees sought to demonstrate empathy with the person who was relating his/her problem, observable both from a physiological response such as the motion of ocular fixation and signs of nodding to the person who was speaking and the attempt to intervene by telling one's own story without respecting communicative rounds. Each time a counselee wanted to intervene by speaking over his/her mate they were invited to wait and not stop the introspective meta-representational process of the person who was speaking. Other participants started to narrate their experiences once other members ended. Judging from later interventions, it seems that there was a sense of belonging to the group which in turn conditioned the direction of the emotional reasoning introduced by members. This was the case of a participant who pointed out her suffering as the result of a friend who terminated the friendship and the related reasoning leading her to feel unworthy, after her mate had just spoken about the death of a relative. This, in turn, led to a response from another participant who expressed her disappointment with her headmaster following the same line of reasoning.

## GROUP DYNAMICS ANALYSIS

As many authors of group dynamics have discovered, the group exists in a society as a primitive need to obtain a sense of identity and self-esteem based upon membership and, in cases where individuals share common activities, is created by the process of adjusting one's conscious and unconscious behavior to the other members of the group.<sup>9</sup>

The LBT group has been studied in its relevant aspects concerning:

Factors of participation and intergroup cohesion: they depend on cultural and communicative homogeneity and on the sharing level of values and goals in the group.<sup>10</sup> A high level of participation has been observed within the group. Considered in the sense of adaptive behavior, the cohesive factor has been an important element in determining people's appropriate interventions. The projective identifica-

tion observed in one-to-one LBT sessions (where aspects of the self are split off and attributed to another person/consultant provoking an alliance in individual Psychotherapy<sup>11</sup>) has been found in LBT group session as well. The emotional alliance found among members of the LBT group and towards the consultant encouraged participation, resulting in a climate of effective mutual collaboration. Furthermore, judging from the type of interventions and the empathy demonstrated in trying to understand other people's feelings, it seems that members trusted each other. Regarding this aspect, the passage of time played a decisive role since interventions became more intimate as members of the group familiarized.

Intergroup Conflict: No intergroup conflict has been observed. Supposing that when a group shares the same interest they may view each member positively, no negative aspects have been relevant considering the dynamics of the group. The role of the consultant with respect to the group: The role of the consultant during the LBT sessions has to be divided into two parts due to the different performance needed in relation to the group. During the first meeting, since the philosophical theory related to the LBT method had been introduced, a major emotional distance between the members and the consultant has been observed, if compared to the results of an LBT one-to-one session. A first attempt to introduce LBT theory background produced both a positive aspect, if we consider that members had time to get acquainted with the method and take time to get to know each other, and a negative one, if we consider the emotional distance (or reduced empathy) between the members themselves and the consultant, initially perceived as a provider of knowledge. Even considering the negative aspect, I hypothesize that the authoritative exposition of the theory could be beneficial in the long run because, besides helping to build a climate of trust, it is supposed to be a useful step to allow people to relay their problems. The emotional distance created by the proposal of an authoritative role of the consultant was, to some extent also reduced by introducing facts and examples taken from other sessions conducted by the consultant. During subsequent sessions, a common affection for the consultant's building of a trusting and relaxing climate has been observed.

Cooperation with the consultant: Cooperation of the group with the consultant has been facilitated by the number of questions the counselees made about the method introduced, indicating that they were trying to understand what their aim was. Dependence on the leader has been observed in the form of a request for ap-

proval put forward by a group member (i.e. *I don't know if what I am saying is right*).

## SIX STEPS OF LBT IN GROUP

In the case scenario presented above, each step of LBT was followed. Each participant exposed his/her problem one by one with great attention to respecting communication rounds. In this context, each step of LBT was applied to the group. Taking into consideration the relevant factors stated above, each LBT step is discussed below.

### *1. Finding the emotional reasoning.*

Once the LBT background with relevant examples was introduced, members of the group began to narrate their life problems. As the LBT method requires, identifying the emotional reasoning was the first step. A high level of participation has been registered noticing that each member expressed their emotions. While applying the  $E=O+R$  formula<sup>12</sup> a difficulty in describing the different emotions of each counselee was noticed in a substantial amount of counsees' interventions. Both the consultant and the other members of the group helped by asking for clarification about the emotions felt, due to the fact that the language used to describe these emotions was not always clear. The members of the group, whilst demonstrating empathy, strengthened the awareness process of the emotion but, in some cases, interfered with the introspective level of the person who was speaking. At this point, the consultant's role was to facilitate the portrayal of different emotions and to apply the  $E=O+R$  formula pointing out the intentional object of the emotion with its rating (for instance, guilt and depression for a strongly negative rated event such as in the case reported above).

### *2. Checking for fallacies.*

In the case reported above, all the members of the group collaborated to discover the can'tstipation fallacy that was easily recognized by referring to the examples provided. All counsees worked cooperatively in pointing out the fallacy. Demonstrating behavioral and linguistic signs of approval, it seemed that the group allowed the counselee to feel relaxed, demonstrating a high level of empathy and comprehension of the exposed reasoning.

### 3. *Refutation of the fallacy.*

In the case reported above, it was useful to look for empirical evidence that disconfirmed the reasoning used by the counselee. The pitfall at this step was that the cohesive factor within the group seemed to have reduced the recognition of one's own fallacy because of the effort to avoid mistakes for fear of being disproved by group members, which suggests that the group members were committing the fallacy of demanding the approval of others.

### 4. *Identifying the guiding virtue for each fallacy.*

Following the refutation of the fallacy of *can'tstipation*, temperance and authenticity were identified as guiding virtues to be achieved in the case presented. Once defined, suggestions on how to achieve these virtues were proposed by the group, thus facilitating the 5<sup>th</sup> step of LBT. Judging from body language and verbal enthusiasm shown, I hypothesize the relevance of this step for the counselee who began to perceive the possibility of overcoming her problem and enhancing her human potential. Here the group had a positive effect in encouraging the counselee to identify with one who possesses the proposed virtues.

### 5. *Find a philosophy for the guiding virtue.*

This step was mostly conducted by the consultant because of a lack of philosophical knowledge within the group. In the instance above, the philosophy proposed was Aristotle's. On the basis of questions that counselees asked, Aristotle's background was also introduced. Regarding the practical case reported above, the philosophy proposed helped the counselee stress a new evaluation of a situation that seemed to be stagnant at first. In the aforementioned case, after having refuted the *can'tstipation* fallacy obstructing the counselee's creative potential, the philosophy of strengthening willpower to overcome a behavioral *can't* was outlined; As Aristotle teaches, giving yourself some behavioral assignments including going in the opposite direction to which you are inclined is a good way to perceive the freedom to overcome a problem, while changing the mental and behavioral attitude in dealing with it. The philosophy proposed indeed provided an antidote to the counselee's fallacy and enabled her to reframe her thinking in avoiding the fallacy.<sup>13</sup>

It is worth mentioning that, *criteria* such as the refutation of the fallacy, the



analysis of the counselees' attitude and the attention paid to the counselees' perspectives have all been taken into consideration in order to choose a suitable philosophy together, so as not to be imposed but instead recognized as a natural and consequent goal to be pursued.

#### 6. *Application of philosophy or life plan.*

In the case reported above, the counselee decided, at this step, to take control of her life by overcoming her "can't." The group at this point demonstrated much empathy in searching for solutions and remedies to help change their mate's behavioral attitude. At the beginning, they proposed huge steps for the counselee, such as leaving her husband, which she decided against, contrary to her first evaluation of the situation.

These initial interventions could be considered as "background noise" but I submit that they were useful as steps toward becoming aware of the initial situation and for pointing to a new life plan coherently based upon the new perception of the self. Once I reminded them of this point, all the group began to suggest smaller steps (i.e. *cultivating one's own passion, trying to go out, again, with friends*) to set up a coherent life plan for the counselee. The limit of philosophical group sessions set to five and the time required to give all participants the opportunity to speak influenced the ability to develop this step under the direction of the consultant. On the other hand, this was also a strong point if we consider the duty of LBT professionals to safeguard the autonomy of counselees and to limit the risks of calculating the benefits of the counselees' life plan.<sup>14</sup>

It must be noted that the practical case reported above refers to the first and second LBT sessions in order of time. Interventions of the other participants overlapped with the exposed case but it was decided to set the LBT group therapy by following one participant at a time, taking into consideration contributions that the group provided. For expository reasons, I won't transcribe each LBT participant's case but I stress the efficiency of the method within the group, referring to the group's positive effect while encouraging achieving a virtuous goal, while demonstrating empathy and connectedness with everyone who participated, thereby facilitating the process of constructive change.

One could say that, at this point and in this very case, the group became a metaphor for temperance embodying the aforementioned proposed virtues. Above

all, I again stress the therapeutic relevance of the necessity to be appreciated by the other members, as having a positive effect in encouraging the counselee to perceive herself as someone possessing the proposed virtues. Notwithstanding, empathy demonstrated amongst members of the group seems to have been the clearest aspect undergirding all interventions. The possibility of leaving her husband pointed out by the counselee encouraged another person to speak about the death of a friend, encouraging another to speak about the ending of a friendship, with the related feeling of unworthiness, a suffering that made another speak about a job discrimination problem.

If it is clear that the level of participation, the intergroup cohesion, and the sense of community conditioned the direction of the themes expressed after the first participant spoke, these same factors played a decisive role in the overall positive outcome of group-applied LBT.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The description of the group's dynamics (taking into consideration factors such as the coefficient of participation, the role of the consultant within the group, the alliance between members of the group, and the projective identification) raises a question concerning the possibility of establishing a behavioral standard within the group to determine whether there are proper conditions being met to have a caring experience. Referring to the aforementioned case, no discriminating factors were observed that would militate against the experience of a healthy climate within the group. This preliminary study on group-applied LBT method outlined both positive and negative results which I briefly summarize below.

The preliminary introduction of the method we were going to use increased the positive aspect of introspection, further reducing emotional resistance. Judging from the results of the empathy demonstrated, I hypothesize that intersubjectivity<sup>15</sup> can be a productive resource in the co-construction of knowledge processes. As stated above, the cohesive factor within the group increased the motivation level of each counselee; it created new parallel dialogues influencing constructive change through the LBT group process, and provided guidelines for comparison with the traditional one-to-one LBT session.

On the other hand, the group-applied LBT method has resulted in an emphasis on good relations and good perception of the self that the counselee envisioned

while speaking about herself, which, if in some cases produced a positive effort in encouraging a coherent perception of actions needed to achieve the identified virtues, in others produced a reduction of the innovative knowledge about self-transformation and a lack of spontaneous processes as well (for instance, in our practical cases, resistance to change an intuitive fallacious reasoning in order to confirm an established image of the self to others).

During the five LBT sessions, another limitation is the dynamics of power established among the counselees and the consultant. As far as I first introduced the philosophical theory behind LBT, the counterpart to its positive effect on the increasing level of introspection with the acquaintance of the technique was a negative one in considering the consultant emotionally distant because the knowledge the counselees valued, they lacked.

I have already mentioned time limits that didn't allow us to verify a correspondence between an evolved rational attitude declared and its practical counterpart due to the number of sessions (as stated above with respect to the 6<sup>th</sup> step of LBT in particular).

I should add that the group has not been considered an autonomous entity but, conversely, a progressive institution of connections, where each participant could expose his story singularly while applying the LBT method.

On the other hand, I hypothesize the LBT method could also be useful in studying the organization of a pre-established group (such as hospitals, company organizations or a group of people suffering from a common issue), thus trying to apply each single step of the LBT to all the members, referring this time to a common issue.

In sum, this preliminary study showed the effectiveness of LBT in non pre-assembled groups, with the further possibility of applying it in contexts of pre-formed organizations or therapy groups. Perhaps, more research is needed to analyze constructive change mechanisms in groups and, specifically, in long-term LBT counseling interventions.

*Barbara Piozzini, a native of Milan, Italy, teaches philosophy and history in high school and works as a philosophical consultant using the modality of Logic-Based Therapy (LBT). She has researched LBT as applied to groups, and is currently engaged in further research with Elliot D. Cohen into the efficacy of LBT.*

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## ENDNOTES

1. Nicola Abbagnano, Giovanni Fornero, *Itinerari di Filosofia*, 2002, Paravia Bruno Mondadori Editori
2. Nicola Abbagnano, *op cit.* Pag.298. E.g., all men are white, no man is white, some men are white, some men aren't white.
3. For better explanation see, Boniolo, Vidali, *Strumenti per ragionare, Logica e teoria dell'argomentazione*. Milano, 2011, Bruno Mondadori, pag. 6
4. Elliot D. Cohen, *What would Aristotle do?: self-control through the power of reason*, New York, 2003, Prometheus Books, pag. 29
5. Elliot D, Cohen, *Logic basics: some preliminary distinctions for logic based therapy*, Institute of Critical Thinking
6. See Elliot D. Cohen, *LBT Basics, lecture 2, Institute of Critical Thinking*

7. *Principles claimed to be explained through an abstract word. Claiming that anger is an aggressive instinct is a practical example of what it is meant by a dormitive principle according to Gregory Bateson. See Gregory Bateson, Verso un'ecologia della mente , Milano, 2013 edizioni Adelphi.*
8. See Elliot D. Cohen, *LBT Basics, lecture 2, Institute of Critical Thinking*
9. Cesare Kaneklin, *Il gruppo in teoria e in pratica*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 2010
10. C. Kaneklin *Ibidem*
11. Melanie Kleinn, 1946 'Notes on some schizoid mechanisms'. See <http://www.melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/projective-identification>
12. Elliot D. Cohen, *Primary Training Workshop in LBT*, Institute of Critical Thinking
13. See, Elliot D. Cohen *op. cit.* ,*Primary Training Workshop in Logica-Based Therapy (LBT)*
14. <https://depts.washington.edu/bioethx/topics/spirit.html>
15. Husserl, *Meditazioni cartesiane* , 1999, Armando Editore