

[Title of Paper]

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[Degree Program], Denver Seminary

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Month XX, 2020

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“Elements of the title page are double-spaced, and an additional double-spaced blank line appears between the title and byline” (2.21).

Commented [JHM2]: The preferred form of an author’s name is first name, middle initial(s), and last name.

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MA-Counseling, Denver Seminary

Guided Imagery and Progressive Muscle Relaxation in Group Psychotherapy

A majority of Americans experience stress in their daily lives (American Psychological Association, 2017). Thus, an important goal of psychological research is to evaluate techniques that promote stress reduction and relaxation. Two techniques that have been associated with reduced stress and increased relaxation in psychotherapy contexts are guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation (McGuigan & Lehrer, 2007). *Guided imagery* aids individuals in connecting their internal and external experiences, allowing them, for example, to feel calmer externally because they practice thinking about calming imagery. *Progressive muscle relaxation* involves diaphragmatic breathing and the tensing and releasing of 16 major muscle groups; together these behaviors lead individuals to a more relaxed state (Jacobson, 1938; Trakhtenberg, 2008). Guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation are both cognitive behavioral techniques (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005) in which individuals focus on the relationship among thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (White, 2000).

Group psychotherapy effectively promotes positive treatment outcomes in patients in a cost-effective way. Its efficacy is in part attributable to variables unique to the group experience of therapy as compared with individual psychotherapy (Bottomley, 1996; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). That is, the group format helps participants feel accepted and better understand their common struggles; at the same time, interactions with group members provide social support and models of positive behavior (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Thus, it is useful to examine how stress reduction and relaxation can be enhanced in a group context.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the research base on guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation in group psychotherapy contexts. I provide overviews of both guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation, including theoretical foundations and

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- For two authors, use an ampersand (&) between the names (e.g., McGuigan & Lehrer, 2007).
- For three or more authors, include the name of only the first author plus *et al.* (8.17).

See Table 8.1. Basic In-Text Citation Styles for examples of how to cite one or more authors (or groups) both in the text and in parenthetical cites.

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historical context. Then I examine guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation as used on their own as well as in combination as part of group psychotherapy (see Baider et al., 1994, for more). Throughout the review, I highlight themes in the research. Finally, I end by pointing out limitations in the existing literature and exploring potential directions for future research.

Guided Imagery

Features of Guided Imagery

Guided imagery involves a person visualizing a mental image and engaging each sense (e.g., sight, smell, touch) in the process. Guided imagery was first examined in a psychological context in the 1960s, when the behavior theorist Joseph Wolpe helped pioneer the use of relaxation techniques such as aversive imagery, exposure, and imaginal flooding in behavior therapy (Achterberg, 1985; Utay & Miller, 2006). Patients learn to relax their bodies in the presence of stimuli that previously distressed them, to the point where, according to Achterberg (1985) in *Imagery in Healing*, further exposure to the stimuli no longer provokes a negative response. Rausch et al. (2006) concluded the following:

A mere 20 min of these group interventions was effective in reducing anxiety to normal levels . . . merely 10 min of the interventions allowed [the high-anxiety group] to recover from the stressor. Thus, brief interventions of meditation and progressive muscle relaxation may be effective for those with clinical levels of anxiety and for stress recovery when exposed to brief, transitory stressors. (p. 287)

Thus, even small amounts of progressive muscle relaxation can be beneficial for people experiencing anxiety.

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Commented [JM13]: Level 2 heading, 2.27, Table 2.3, Figure 2.5.

Commented [JM14]: Publication year in parentheses after author's name when part of the narrative, 8.10, Figure 8.2.

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Commented [JM18]: Cite the quoted source at the end of a block quotation in parentheses after the final punctuation or else cite the author and year in the narrative before the quotation and place only the page number in parentheses after the final punctuation (8.27). Do not add a period after the closing parenthesis in either case.

Guided Imagery in Group Psychotherapy

Guided imagery exercises improve treatment outcomes and prognosis in group psychotherapy contexts (Skovholt & Thoen, 1987). Lange (1982) underscored two such benefits by showing (a) the role of the group psychotherapy leader in facilitating reflection on the guided imagery experience, including difficulties and stuck points, and (b) the benefits achieved by social comparison of guided imagery experiences between group members. Teaching techniques and reflecting on the group process are unique components of guided imagery received in a group context (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005).

Empirical research focused on guided imagery interventions supports the efficacy of the technique with a variety of populations within hospital settings, with positive outcomes for individuals diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and eating disorders (Utay & Miller, 2006). Guided imagery and relaxation techniques have even been found to “reduce distress and allow the immune system to function more effectively” (Trakhtenberg, 2008, p. 850). For example, Holden-Lund (1988) examined effects of a guided imagery intervention on surgical stress and wound healing in a group of 24 patients. Patients listened to guided imagery recordings and reported reduced state anxiety, lower cortisol levels following surgery, and less irritation in wound healing compared with a control group. Holden-Lund concluded that the guided imagery recordings contributed to improved surgical recovery. It would be interesting to see how the results might differ if guided imagery was practiced continually in a group context.

Guided imagery has also been shown to reduce stress, length of hospital stay, and symptoms related to medical and psychological conditions (Scherwitz et al., 2005). For example, Ball et al. (2003) conducted guided imagery in a group psychotherapy format with 11 children (ages 5–18) experiencing recurrent abdominal pain.

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Commented [JM24]: “Et al.” citation for a work with three or more authors, narrative reference, 8.17.

Commented [JM25]: Numbers expressed as numerals for 10 and above, 6.32.

References

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- The references start on a new page.
- “References” should be centered and in bold type.
- Each reference cited in the text must also appear in the reference list (for exceptions, see 8.4).
- Alphabetize by last name.
- Double space entries as shown.

For more reference examples refer to 10.1–10.8.

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