The Group Questionnaire (GQ) – Psychometric properties among outpatients with personality disorders

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Conflict of interest:

None of the above authors have any financial disclosure or other conflicts of interest related to this study. Gary Burlingame is one of the co-authors of the GQ but was not involved in the conceptualization or analysis of this paper.

Abstract

Objective: Relational and emotional vulnerability represent essential problems among patients with personality disorder (PD). Group psychotherapy is a central component of evidence-based PD treatments. Generally, patient and therapist interrelationships predict improvement in therapy. However, although treatment of patients with PD is a more complex process, group processes are poorly elaborated in PD research. Documentation of the psychometric quality of group process measures in PD samples is an important precursor of such research. The *Group Questionnaire—GQ* is based on concepts of group cohesion and climate, empathy, and alliance and aims to capture the quality of member-member, member-group and member-leader relationships in group therapy. A 3-latent factor structure (positive bond, positive work and negative relationship) has generally been supported. This study aimed to perform a psychometric analysis of GQ administered in a clinical population of patients with PD.

Method: The study included 369 patients with PDs attending group psychotherapy in 14 outpatient treatment units on a specialist mental health service level within the Norwegian Network of Personality Disorders in the period 2017-2020. Psychometric analyses included 3-latent factors and 8 sub-facets.

Results: The 3-latent factors, positive bond, positive work and negative relationship were replicated. Psychometric integrity of the tripartite relationship structure—member-member, member-group and member-leader, with 8 sub-facets, was supported.

Conclusions: The GQ with 3-latent factors and 8 sub-facets can be recommended for future research and clinical practice in patient populations with PD.

Highlights and Implications

- The study highlights that GQ can satisfactorily capture the group psychotherapy process for patients with personality disorder in its current form with three latent factors and eight sub facets
- Results replicate former research on the psychometric qualities of GQ
- Results implicate that the GQ can be useful in further research on PD treatment processes and mechanisms and mediators of change

Keywords

Factor analysis; GQ; Group Questionnaire; Group relationship; Group therapy, Personality disorder.

Introduction

Personality disorders (PDs) are frequent mental disorders (Winsper, Bilgin, Thompson, et al., 2020) with a reported prevalence of 40% within mental health services (Newton-Howes, Tyrer, Anagnostakis, et al., 2010). Features of PD can be conceptualized within dimensions of self and interpersonal personality functioning with core interpersonal problems of social insecurity and communication (Bender, Morey & Skodol, 2011; Hutsebaut, Feenstra & Kamphuis, 2016, Fonagy et al., 2017). Both self and interpersonal dimensions are likely to have considerable implications for the group therapy treatment process. PD patients may, in particular, have profound difficulties trusting and connecting to other people, or conversely, describe extreme dependency and easily activated fears of separation. Understanding and managing responses in a complex, social arena such as group psychotherapy, may be particularly challenging (Kvarstein et al., 2020). However, only few studies have studied the significance of aspects of group relationships, for example therapeutic alliance, in specialized group-based PD treatments (Euler et al., 2018; Folmo, Stänicke, Johansen, et al., 2021).

Both efficacy and effectiveness of group psychotherapy are generally well established for a variety of mental disorders (Burlingame & Strauss, 2021; Burlingame, Strauss, & Joyce, 2013). Research has indicated that individual and group formats are equally effective in promoting change (Burlingame, Seebeck, Janis, et al., 2016). Within specialist mental health services, group psychotherapy is a frequent treatment approach (Lorentzen & Ruud, 2014) and in specialized PD treatments, groups often represent core components (Storebø, Stoffers-Winter, Vollum, et al., 2020). Although results revealed considerable heterogeneity, a meta-analysis of 24 randomized controlled trials of group-based treatments for borderline PD concluded that the group therapy format can be recommended for these patients (McLaughlin et al., 2019).

According to an integrative model, components that may explain the outcome of group treatments consist of elements from formal change theory, aspects of small group processes, therapist and patient characteristics, and structural aspects, such as duration of treatment, session frequency, and group size, or interactions across these domains (Burlingame et al., 2013). Characteristic and

complex aspects of groups are the multiple and different relationships that develop between group participants. In clinical and empirical group literature group cohesion is the most popular of several group relationships constructs (e.g. therapeutic alliance, group climate, and group atmosphere). Group cohesion has, over time, become synonymous with the therapeutic relationship in group psychotherapy (Burlingame, Fuhrman, and Johnson, 2002). However, an array of partly overlapping cohesion instruments exist, and consensual definitions between the different measures are lacking (Alldredge, Burlingame, Yang, & Rosendahl, 2021; Hornsey, Dwyer, Oei, & Dingle, 2009; Hornsey, Dwyer, & Oei, 2007). In spite of this diversity of measures and definitions of group relationships, ample evidence supports dimensions of cohesion incorporating member-leader relationships, member to member relationships and the group as a whole (Dion, 2000). Two meta-analyses of 40 and 55 studies, have demonstrated that group cohesion significantly predicts patient improvement across a wide range of theory orientations and patient populations (Burlingame, McClendon, & Alonso, 2011; Burlingame, McClendon, & Yang, 2018). Within the PD research field, literature on the role of group process factors is scarce (McLaughlin et al., 2019). Despite emphasis on group dynamics in several treatment manuals for borderline PD, few have investigated change processes, therapeutic alliance and group cohesion. Nonetheless, several qualitative studies of patients with borderline PD in specialized PD treatment have emphasized participation in group therapies often offers strong learning experiences (Morken, Binder, Arefjord, et al., (2019).

Development of the Group Questionnaire

As a part of a programmatic research conducted by the Consortium for Group Research and Practice or C-GRP (<http://crgp.byu.edu>) in the early 2000s (Burlingame, Gleave, Beecher, et al., 2016), Johnson and colleagues (2005) sought to achieve a conceptual clarification of the conundrum of competing cohesion measures and carried out factor analyses including items from the four most commonly used measures: Group Climate Questionnaire (GCQ; MacKenzie, 1983), The Therapeutic Factors Inventory, Subscale Cohesiveness (TFI-Coh; Lese & MacNair-Semands, 2000), Working Alliance Inventory (WAI; Horvath & Greenberg, 1989), and The Empathy Scale (ES; Burns & Auerbach, 1996). The

resulting model identified a latent relationship quality dimension with three factors, two affective aspects (positive emotional bonds and negative relationships) and one work-based facet of group relationships (positive work), and a latent relationship structure dimension (member-leader, member-member, member-group). Participants from two sets of groups were used: The first was a clinical sample of 326 participants from 81 groups at 14 university counseling centers across the US and the second was non-clinical consisting of 336 professional group therapists who participated in 30 two-day training groups.

This model was later replicated in a sample of 453 members from inpatient groups from 15 hospitals in Germany and Switzerland (Bormann & Strauss, 2007), and it was partially replicated in a sample of 145 outpatients with heterogeneous diagnoses, treated in 9 short- and 9 long-term groups in Norway (Bakali, Baldwin, & Lorentzen, 2009).

Eventually, a more user-friendly measure of group relationships, the Group Questionnaire, was developed in two further C-GRP studies, by reducing the number of underlying items from 80+ items used in the Johnson model to 30 items in the Group Questionnaire. The data reduction relied heavily on both empirical data analysis and clinical judgment, and in general, items with smaller factor loadings or high correlations with other items were eliminated, without information loss. The 30 item GQ model replicated the Johnson model with 485 members participating in nonclinical outpatient, and inpatient groups in the US (GQ; Krogel, 2008; Krogel et al., 2013). A German version of the GQ has also been validated by Bormann and colleagues (2011), who analyzed 424 members from 67 inpatient groups from 15 hospitals in Germany and Switzerland, confirming the Johnson model. Moreover, the GQ criterion validity was assessed to be high with the original four therapeutic relationships measures in US data from 290 patients from 65 treatment groups at 4 university counseling centers and 1 community mental health clinic (Thayer & Burlingame, 2014). A mega-analysis provided further support for the factorial validity of GQ. By including data from six former studies, comprising a total of 2479 participants, Janis, Burlingame and Olsen (2018) concluded that the constructs are operating in the same way across different populations. Finally, a recently developed Italian version of the GQ has been validated in a

sample of 536 group members from 32 nonclinical groups of undergraduate students, and the results from different structural equation models in multilevel confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the three-factor structure of the GQ, defined by Positive bond, Positive work, and Negative relationship (Giannone, Guarnaccia, Gullo, et al., 2020). It should also be mentioned that a systematic review and quality assessment of group process questionnaires (Orfanos, Burn, Priebe, & Spector, 2020) including 13 different measures, rated Group Questionnaire (Krogel et al., 2013) as the most appropriate measure if one is interested in measuring overall group processes.

Thus, Krogel et al.'s (2013) 30-item questionnaire (GQ), based on Johnson et al.'s model (2005) of group relationship organized in Positive Bonding, Positive Working, and Negative Relationship, has been validated in various samples: professionals in the field of group psychotherapy, undergraduate students, outpatients from university counseling and community mental health centers, chronic inpatients with severe mental illness, and inpatients hospitalized in German and Swiss clinics and psychiatric hospitals. All findings have supported the factor structure initially proposed by Johnson and colleagues (2005). However, none of these numerous studies of GQ are, to the best of our knowledge, based on study samples representative of patients with PD. A psychometrically sound and valid measure of central group relationships is essential to further research aiming to explore the associations between aspects of these processes and outcome, for patients with PD treated in groups.

So far, the GQ has been used to monitor the course of therapy and help therapists to detect and attend to problems when group relationships worsen or patients deteriorate, and studies show that such feedback improves outcomes and reduces attritions from therapy in more heterogeneous patient samples (Burlingame, Whitcomb, Woodland et al., 2018). More recent papers demonstrate how central therapeutic alliance that mostly has been studied in individual psychotherapy, also is for group therapy (Alldredge, Burlingame, Olsen et al., 2020) and how ruptured alliances are detected and coupled with the therapists repair attempts in group therapy, using the GQ (Burlingame, Allredge, & Arnold, 2021).

Although several studies on GQ have either validated the factor structure, i.e. with reference to the Johnson model (2005), or compared GQ scores with other measures of alliance, we do not know of

any study that has focused on possible associations between GQ scores and concurrent measures of subjective distress related to depression, anxiety, social functioning, or overall patient satisfaction. One exception to this is perhaps process studies using the Outcome Questionnaire-45 (OQ-45: Lambert, Hansen, & Finch, 2001), such as Obeid and colleagues (2018), but they are outcome studies showing the impact of group relationship on treatment outcome.

Aims of the current study

The aim of the current study is to validate the proposed factor structure of the Norwegian version of GQ in a sample of patients with PD or severe personality problems, analyze the relationship between the different sub-facets of GQ, as well as its relations to measures of depression, anxiety, social and occupational functioning, and overall satisfaction with treatment. Our hypotheses will be the following: 1) The composition of GQ reveals the same factor and conceptual structure as proposed by the Johnson model. 2) Concurrent levels of subjective distress have minor associations with the perceived group relationship, and 3) Group relationship is substantially associated with overall patient satisfaction.

Material and methods

The context for data collection

In this multi-site, naturalistic study, the material comprised data from 14 outpatient units within the Norwegian Network for Personality Disorders (The Network) (Karterud et al., 2003). All units are outpatient services on a specialist mental health service level, providing treatment for a broad range of patients with significant personality problems and PD. Group therapies constitute a central treatment format. The most frequent formats are long-term (psychodynamic) psychotherapy groups in a stand-alone format or incorporated in a comprehensive outpatient program, most often mentalization-based treatment (MBT). More structured/focused short-term groups using psychodynamic, cognitive or pedagogical techniques (psychoeducation) are also frequent. In addition, several units offer art therapy and body awareness in a group format. Among multicomponent PD treatment programs combining group and individual formats, schema-focused therapy and dialectical behavioral therapy are also

represented in addition to MBT (see Table 1). Treatment duration is most often time-limited, for short-term groups approximately 6 months, and for long-term groups, 2-3 years. The therapist teams are mainly multidisciplinary including psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses and social workers. All group leaders are formally trained in their respective discipline (i.e. group analytic psychotherapy, MBT, DBT).

– Insert Table 1 approx. here –

All units within the Network have the same assessment procedures, including initial clinical and diagnostic evaluations, and follow-up evaluations every six months during treatment. Clinical data from these assessments are collected in an anonymous, data registry for research purposes, thus aggregating data across units. Evaluation includes both patient self-report and therapist reported information. The GQ was incorporated in this collection of evaluation instruments used within the treatment units as a regular routine.

The study sample

Within units, the initial evaluation process can last from 3 weeks to 3 months, and some patients are allotted to a waiting list before treatment can start. Thus, the patients vary as to how long they have been in treatment at the time of the first six-month evaluation. Consequently, to ensure that all patients had some experience of the group treatment, data in this study represents the second six-month evaluation, one year after the initial assessment. An implication of this choice is that data mainly represents attendance in long-term psychotherapy groups. Of a total sample of 1329 psychiatric outpatients admitted to treatment in the period between August 2017 and April 2019, 852 participants had been in treatment long enough for the one-year assessment to take place. Among these, the final study sample included 369 participants (43%) who had completed the one-year assessment.

The participants

In the final study sample (N=369), 78% were females, mean age was 30.6 years (SD = 8.6), 56% was either in work or study prior to treatment, 63% were single. Twenty-three per cent reported

incidents of self-mutilation and 5% had attempted suicide in the six-month period before the one-year assessment. Seventy-six percent had one or more PD diagnoses, borderline and avoidant PD being the two dominating categories, and 93% had one or more symptom disorders. See Table 2 for a more detailed description of diagnostic prevalence.

The average number of participants per treatment unit was 26 (median 23, range 8-41). In the inclusion period (2017-2019) a total of 109 long-term groups were active across the 14 units. Data on the nature of treatment given in the six-month period prior to the one-year assessment (therapist reported) was available for 80% of the study sample (N=288) (Table 1).

Group Questionnaire

The Group Questionnaire (GQ) is a 30-item self-report questionnaire measuring the multi-faceted therapeutic relationships in groups, capturing aspects of alliance, cohesion and climate. The questionnaire is organized around *three qualitative aspects* of relationships, each operationalized to characterize the perceived relationships between two to three, *structural sub-components*, i. e. leader, group and other group members (Krogel et al., 2013): *Positive Bond*; toward the group (climate), the leader (alliance), and the members (cohesion), *Positive Work*; with the group (Task/goals), and leader (Task/goals), and *Negative Relationship*; with the group (conflict), leader (alliance rupture), and members (empathic failure). Thus, the GQ comprises eight different sub-components. See Appendix 1. GQ is scored on a 7-point response format (1-7) from “not true” to “very true”, and the current GQ measures are scored with reference to the respondents’ last attended group meeting. The Norwegian translation of the GQ was created in accordance with the guidelines of Wild and colleagues (2005) by a group of five persons, in which four had a PhD and four had extensive experience in group therapy, and one was a native English speaker.

The organization of questions (items) addressing member-group, member-leader, and member-member relations is theoretically sound, but gives no meaning psychometrically. The reason is that within each of these groups of items, there are three different sub-groups, addressing positive bond, positive work, and negative relations. Combining these into one single score to operationalize the three

structural relationships would make such a score hard to interpret. Psychometrically, there are two possible ways to combine the items of GQ. The first is to organize and combine them into three constructs addressing positive bond, positive work, and negative relationship. The second is to organize the items into eight sub-components. In the first procedure, a model of three first-order latent constructs can be tested. In the second procedure, a model of eight first-order latent constructs can be tested, as well as a second-order conceptual model with eight first-order constructs, accounted for by three second- or higher-order constructs.

In the current study, sub-facets are computed by taking the average of responses on their respective items, and in that way make the sub-facets comparable to each other. Due to different numbers of items within each domain and sub-facet, computing measures by adding up item responses into sum scores makes comparisons hard. In the current study the domain scores are computed as sum scores to enable comparisons with findings from former studies.

Diagnostic assessment

Clinical diagnosis was assessed according to the DSM-5 (APA, 2013) using the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5 Personality Disorders for PD (SCID-5-PD: First, Williams, Karg, & Spitzer, 2015) and the Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview (M.I.N.I: Sheehan & Lecrubier, 1994) for symptom disorders. Diagnostic reliability was not investigated. However, diagnostic assessments were performed in each unit by clinical staff who had received systematic training in diagnostic interviews and principles of the LEAD-procedure (Longitudinal, Expert, All-Data: (Pedersen et al., 2013; Spitzer, 1983). This means that diagnoses were based on all available information including referral letters, self-reported history and complaints, and overall clinical impression, in addition to diagnostic interviews.

Clinical measures

Prior to the collection of data to the current study a measure of client satisfaction was constructed comprising the five following questions: *Do you feel that your problems have been taken*

seriously?; Have you gained a better understanding of what you are struggling with?; Have you become more able to cope with your problems in everyday life?; Have you felt well taken care of throughout the treatment period?; and Has the treatment been useful to you? The questions are rated on a four-point scale (1-4) from *Absolutely not* (1), *No, not very much* (2), *Yes, mostly* (3), to *Yes absolutely* (4). A formal psychometric evaluation of the scale has not yet been reported, but scale reliability based on the current study is reported in table 3. Mean inter-item correlation was 0.455 (range 0.299-0.533). The scoring instruction to the scale, called *Client Satisfaction Scale* (CSS) was “*Below you will find some questions about the treatment you have received. Please circle the number that best describes your opinion*”. The CSS was administered, along with the GQ and other clinical measures, every six months after the initial assessment.

Psychosocial functioning was assessed by the Work and Social Adjustment Scale (WSAS; Mundt, Marks, Shear, & Greist, 2002), a self-report 5-item scale of functional impairment that measures the level of impairment on a scale from 0 to 8, with 0 indicating no impairment at all and 8 indicating very severe impairment. The scores on the five different items are summarized by a total score of 0-40. The WSAS constitutes a reliable instrument, measuring the individual variation in a clinically important aspect of impairment (Pedersen, Kvarstein, & Wilberg, 2017). According to Matraix-Cols and colleagues (2005), WSAS scores above 30 denote severe disability, scores between 15 and 30 denote moderate impairment, and scores below 15 can be regarded as mild impairment or disability. This categorization has been supported in a similar clinical sample as the current one (Pedersen et al., 2017).

Self-reported level of depression was measured by the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9; Kroenke, Spitzer, & Williams, 2001), a nine-item questionnaire with a four-point response format (0-3) from “Not at all” to “Nearly every day”. PHQ-9 scores are computed as the sum score of all nine items, ranging from 0-27. According to Kroenke & Spitzer (2001) cut-points of PHQ-9 represent the following levels of depression: None (0-4); Mild (5-9); Moderate (10-14); Moderately Severe (15-19); and Severe (20-27).

Self-reported level of anxiety was measured by the Patient Health Questionnaire (GAD-7; Spitzer, Kroenke, Williams, & Lowe, 2006) , a seven-item questionnaire with a four-point response format (0-3) from “Not at all” to “Nearly every day”. GAD-7 scores are computed as the sum score of all seven items, ranging from 0-21. According to Löwe and colleagues (2008) cut-points of GAD-7 represents the following levels of anxiety: None (0-4); Mild (5-9); Moderate (10-15); and Severe (> 15).

Statistics

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was done in three steps. Firstly, we conducted a first-order CFA of the three global dimensions of GQ. Secondly, we conducted a first-order CFA of the eight sub-facets of GQ. Thirdly, we conducted a second-order (full) model of GQ with the sub-facets on the first level and the global dimensions on the second higher order level. Lastly, we analyzed mean scores and scale reliability of the GQ measures, as well as inter-correlations between them.

Descriptive and correlational statistics, as well as Chi-square (χ^2) and t-test statistics was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Release 26 (IBM, 2019). The CFA was conducted with Mplus 7.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 2015) with estimations based on the Maximum Likelihood Mean adjusted (MLM) function (Curran, West & Finch, 1996). Goodness of fit was estimated by Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990), the Tucker Lewis index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI; Bentler, 1990). Scale reliability was estimated by McDonald’s Omega (ω) (McDonald, 1999; Trizano-Hermosilla & Alvarado, 2016).

A RMSEA value of 0.05 or below indicates a good model fit, values between 0.05 and 0.08 indicate a reasonable fit, values between 0.08 and 0.10 a mediocre fit, and values greater than 0.10 an unacceptable fit (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). The general consensus is to use a cut-off value close to 0.06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) or a stringent upper limit of 0.07 (Steiger, 2007). Values greater than 0.90 on CFI and TLI are normally required for good model fit, although Hu and Bentler (1999) have suggested a $TLI \geq 0.95$ as the threshold.

Missing GQ items

Among those who had completed GQ, some had missing GQ items. In all, 52 patients had missing items (14%), among whom 32 (61.5%) had one missing item and 5 (9.6%) had two missing items. Two patients had the maximum number of six missing items on GQ. Due to the low frequency and lack of a systematic pattern (no specific item had more missing response than others), they were considered random and of no threat to the validity of inferences from the current study. The estimation method for the CFA (MLM) requires exclusion of cases with missing items. Accordingly, the total number of observations for the CFA was 317. For the computation of scale scores, mean scores of items within each scale was computed regardless of missing items. In this way, the value of missing items is estimated to the mean of item responses within the rest of the scale.

Missing one-year assessments

Among the 57% with missing one-year assessments, 84% lacked both patient and therapist reports, indicating that the main reason for missing data was administrative, failing routines at the one-year assessment.

In order to investigate possible sample bias, Chi-square tests based on 2x2 tables were conducted to compare missing diagnosis between those with (n=369) and those without a valid GQ at the one-year assessment (n=483). Among participants without GQ, 15% (n=72) lacked all information on PD diagnosis, compared to 8% (n=29) of participants with GQ ($p<.01$). Further investigation of possible differences in diagnostic distribution of PD (Chi-square tests) revealed that paranoid PD (PaPD) was diagnosed more frequently among participants who lacked GQ (11%, n=44) compared to those with GQ (6%, n=19, $p<.05$), and likewise, that obsessive-compulsive PD (OcPD) was also more frequent among those who lacked GQ (10%, n=39) compared to those with GQ 4% (n=15, $p<.01$). Diagnostic information on symptom disorders was lacking for 37% (n=178) of the participants without GQ, compared to 23% (n=84) with GQ ($p<.001$). Among participants with information on symptom disorders, differences between the two groups were not significant ($p>.05$). Thus, the current study sample with GQ data comprises a generally larger number of participants with information on diagnostic assessment,

but more specifically, somewhat fewer patients with PaPD and OcPD than its comparable counterpart (those without GQ). Neither PD represented a dominating PD in this sample.

– Insert Table 2 approx. here –

To further analyze possible impact of some bias in the frequency of PaPD and OcPD, independent t-tests were conducted in the study sample in order to compare mean scores on the eight GQ sub-facets for participants with and without these diagnoses. No differences were found for seven of the sub-facets, but participants with PaPD had higher scores on the sub-facet *Negative Relationship to the leader* (NRL) (3.40, SD 1.48 versus 2.59, SD 1.37, $p < .05$). Comparison of those with and without OcPD revealed no significant differences in sub-facet scores ($p > .05$).

Lastly, comparison of baseline-data in the study sample ($n=369$) with those who lacked one-year assessment ($n=483$), revealed no significant differences in the frequency of self-mutilation, suicide attempts, or levels of self-reported depression, anxiety or social functioning ($p < .05$). We conclude that such bias in the current study sample is therefore minimal.

Nested data

Data from the current study are from multiple sites, with patients nested within groups, and groups nested within sites. A limitation in the design is that the nesting structure is not registered. The factor-analysis is not adjusted for the nesting structure and must be interpreted with this in mind. An analysis of measurement invariance (MI) between the 14 different units was initiated, the model did not converge as the number of parameters to be estimated (means, variances, and covariances) is greater than the number of observations within most of the groups of units. The ICCs for all 30 items of GQ across the 14 units varied between 0.002 and 0.100 (mean: 0.021, SD: 0.022). In other words, site-differences contributed only a small part of the total variance.

Ethics

All participating patients from each treatment unit gave their written consent to use anonymous, clinical data for research purposes. Anonymized data from each treatment unit was

collected and transferred to a common research database. The collection procedures were approved by local data protection officer for each contributing unit. Data security procedures for the research database were approved by data protection officer at the responsible center for the research (Network for Personality disorders, Section for Personality Psychiatry and specialized treatments, Oslo University Hospital). Since the data are anonymous, formal approval from the Norwegian State Data Inspectorate and Regional Committee for Medical Research and Ethics is not required.

Results

First-order three-factor CFA of GQ

A confirmatory first-order factor analysis testing model fit of three domains; *Positive Bond*, *Positive Work*, and *Negative Relationship*, yielded poor fit: $\chi^2 = 1891.689$ (df: 402), RMSEA = .108 (90% C.I.: 0.103-0.113), CFI = .740, and TLI = .718. Poor fit was mostly due to an uneven covariance structure indicating multi-dimensionality, and residual covariance of items within and between the three constructs. No cross-loading of items were causing misfit. Inter-correlations between the three latent variables were as follows – *Positive Bond* with *Positive Work*: .721 ($p < .001$), *Negative Relationship* with *Positive Bond* and *Positive Work*: -.796 ($p < .001$) and -.598 ($p < .001$), respectively.

First-order eight-factor CFA of GQ

A confirmatory first-order factor analysis testing model fit of the eight sub-facets yielded good model fit: $\chi^2 = 732.957$ (df: 377), RMSEA = .055 (90% C.I.: 0.049-0.060), CFI = .938, and TLI = .928, with no critical indications of model modifications (i.e. critical cross-loadings or residual covariance).

Second-order CFA of GQ

In the second-order CFA, the eight first-order sub-facets were modeled under three higher-order latent constructs in the following way: *Positive Bond* – accounting for variance of positive bond related to the group, the leader, and the members, *Positive Work* – accounting for variance of positive work related to the group, and leader, and *Negative Relationship* – accounting for variance of negative relationships related to the group, leader, and members. Each of the eight sub-facets are modeled to

account for variance of their respective indicators (items). See appendix 1 and figure 1 for the operationalization and conceptual model, respectively.

The initial analysis revealed a somewhat acceptable model fit: $\chi^2 = 904.446$ (df: 394, RMSEA = .064 (90% C.I.: 0.058-0.069), CFI = .911, and TLI = .901. The most prominent reason for model weakness was due to covariance between the latent first-order factors addressing the leader aspects within the three higher order construct; negative relation (NRL) with positive bond (PBL) and positive work (PWL) ($r = -.741$ and $-.424$, respectively), and between positive bond (PBL) and positive work (PWL) ($r = .764$). Secondly, model fit was weakened by residual covariance between item 21 and 22: *“The group leaders did not always understand the way I felt inside”* and *“The other group members did not always understand the way I felt inside”* ($r = .493$), and between item 4 and 30: *“The other group members and I respect each other”* and *“The group members accept one another”* ($r = .334$). Model modifications due to these constraints yielded good model fit: $\chi^2 = 688.426$ (df: 389, RMSEA = .049 (90% C.I.: 0.043-0.055), CFI = .948, and TLI = .941. See Figure 1 for conceptual model with parameter estimates.

– Insert Figure 1 approx. here –

Descriptive statistics, scale reliability and correlations

Table 3 gives descriptive statistics, scale reliability of the GQ sub- and global scales, as well as correlations between the GQ scales. The subscales of GQ reveal highest mean scores for scales addressing positive bond, whereas scales addressing negative relationships show the lowest mean scores. Scale reliability was in the acceptable range for most scales, except for the GQ subscale addressing negative relationships to the group (NRG), with an Omega of 0.64 (Table 3).

As to zero-order correlations between the GQ scales, these were in the low to moderate level with the highest relation between positive bond between members and the group as a whole ($r = .818$, $p < .001$). The weakest relation was found between positive work with leader and negative relations with the group as a whole ($r = -.203$, $p < .001$). The zero-order correlations between the three global dimensions of GQ were in the moderate to high range (Table 3).

Measures of patients satisfaction with the treatment (CSS) was at large moderately associated with the measures of GQ, with strongest relation to Positive Work with leaders and generally Positive Bond. Weakest association was found between CSS and Negative Relationship with the group (Table 3). Associations between measures of depression (PHQ-9), anxiety (GAD-7) and social functioning (WSAS) was generally in the low range, but in expected direction, i.e. higher levels of distress correlated negatively with the positive facets of GQ, and vice versa (Table 3).

– Insert Table 3 approx. here –

Discussion

Factor analysis

The first CFA testing a model of the three higher order dimensions; *Positive Bond*, *Positive Work*, and *Negative Relationship*, yielded poor fit according to conventional standards. These findings could be used to argue against the incremental validity of individual subscale interpretations. Further support for this argument comes from the moderate to high correlations between the latent constructs, a finding which partially replicates findings from Janis, Burlingame and Olsen (2018). Stated differently, moderate to high subscale correlations might lower the incremental subscale validity given high common variance.

However, a novel contribution of this paper, compared to past GQ psychometric explorations, was the ordering of GQ items with sub-facets,. More specifically, the sub-facets take into consideration the complex relationship structure found in group treatment (leader, members and group) and fully cross this relationship structure by the three GQ quality subscales (*Positive Bond*, *Positive Work*, and *Negative Relationship*). The second CFA based upon these eight sub-facets yielded acceptable CFA model fit producing a more parsimonious model. Finally, the third CFA (full model) constituted an even more parsimonious model in support of the theoretical conceptualization behind GQ, that is, replicating the three higher-order dimensions when by considering the eight sub-facets.

The residual covariance between item 21 of NRL and item 22 of NRM is a typical method effect stemming from content overlap. Both items contain the same formulation “... *did not always understand*

the way I felt inside", but refer to different targets, i.e. group leader and group members, respectively. Since these items are organized under different sub-facets it would have no impact on the individual subscale interpretation, but might somewhat increase the observed covariance. Both item 21 and 22 are included in the *Negative Relationship* subscale and their residual covariance had minor impact for model fit compared to other item residual covariance ($r=0.269$, $p<.001$). The same content overlap occurred with item 4 and 30 by the formulations; "... *group members and I respect each other*" and "*The group members accept one another*", respectively. Like items 21 and 22, these two items are organized into different sub-facets (PBM and PBG, respectively) but are included in the *Positive Bond* subscale and their residual variance of 0.319 ($p=.001$) and an insignificant impact on overall model fit.

The results of the second-order CFA (full model) was highly comparable to model fit indices and parameter estimates from former studies of GQ (e.g. Bormann et al., 2011; Giannone et al., 2020; Janis et al., 2018; Krogel et al., 2013; Thayer et al., 2014). Some model modifications were applied to improve model fit, but the nature and magnitude of these does not threaten the validity of the conceptual model. After all, the model fit indices from the initial analysis yielded estimates within a less strict acceptable range. Covariance of item residuals is usually a method effect and depending on the magnitude, can be viewed as a necessary scale improvement. Strong associations between latent constructs within a single model, as seen between the "leader" aspects of GQ, can be explained by characteristics of the study sample, commonality among item contents, or both. Findings like this are nearly unavoidable in the assessment of clinical or social constructs addressing opinions, thoughts and feelings. Thus, stringent constraints on confirmatory factor analysis (i.e., no residual covariance or cross-loadings) can lead to misplaced critique or even rejection of a theoretically sound model (See Cole, Chiesa & Steiger, 2007; Hopwood & Donnellan, 2010; Sellbom & Tellegen, 2019).

All in all, the current study supports the conceptual model proposed by Johnson et al. (2005) in a sample representative of patients with PD or severe personality problems. Although the second order CFA of GQ supports the theoretical model of Johnson et al. (2005), an operationalization of these three

dimensions should be interpreted with caution due to multidimensionality. The application of the eight facets be preferable until the global scores are further validated.

Scale levels of GQ and their inter-correlations

Mean scores of the three higher order dimensions of GQ was in the same range as found in former studies (e.g. Giannone et al., 2020; Janis et al., 2018; Krogel et al., 2013). The measure of *Positive Bond* is, on average, around 75, *Negative Relationship* around 25, and *Positive Work* somewhere in-between. This is also reflected by scores on the eight sub-facets of GQ. There are reasons to believe that these estimates are from group therapies that are functioning well, and that these estimates can serve as basis of comparisons at an individual level. In this respect, it would be appropriate to reach an agreement on how to compute the dimensions and sub-facets of GQ.

Each of the eight sub-facets of GQ is operationalized by quite few indicators (items), and especially the three aspects of *Negative Relationship*, with only three items each. Traditionally, a scale with three items and high inter-item correlations would normally indicate that the items are addressing much of the same, and thus measure some narrow aspect only. However, by evaluating the item content of the scales of GQ (Appendix 1), this is not so obviously the case. Moreover, compared to the other sub-facets, the three aspects of *Negative Relationship* had considerably less variance. Thus, the scale reliability of these might be underestimated due to range restrictions (Fife, Mendoza, & Terry, 2012), as also found by Krogel et al. (2013).

GQ and associations to clinical distress and overall patient satisfaction

As assumed, concurrent subjective distress had only minor, although statistically significant, associations with measures of group relationship. However, it adds to the validity of GQ that higher levels of distress were positively associated with negative group relationships, and negatively associated with positive group relationship. Furthermore, positive group relation was associated with higher levels of patients' concurrent overall satisfaction with their treatment, and negative group relations were associated with dissatisfaction of treatment. Although some of these associations are somewhat

general, the results taken together, add to the validity of GQ. For more nuanced studies, application of the eight facets of GQ is preferable.

GQ as a relevant instrument for PD research and treatment monitoring

The currently supported factorial validity and psychometric properties of GQ in this study may facilitate future research on change processes in treatments for patients with PD. The group component is often considered a cornerstone in PD treatment, but is yet poorly documented (Storebro, Stoffers-Winterling, Vollum, et al., 2020). A study of outpatient group psychotherapy for patients with different PDs, suggested satisfactory group processes for the majority of patients, with the exception of unstable patients with borderline PD (Kvarstein, Nordviste, Dragland & Wilberg, 2017). Other studies have likewise indicated problems in the group process for borderline PD patients (Cloitre & Koenen, 2001; Hummelen, Wilberg & Karterud, 2007). A recent study suggested high sensitivity to social exclusion as a predictor of poorer group alliance (Euler, Wrege, Busmann, Lindenmeyer, Kvarstein, 2018). Although not specifying group processes, a recent PD study highlighted interactions between the mutual agreement on aims and tasks in therapy and positive outcomes (Folmo, Stänicke, Johansen, Pedersen, et al., 2020). Further investigation of therapist interventions, specific patient and alliance factors has indeed been recommended in this field of research (Barnicot, Katsakou, Bhatti, Savill, et al., 2012). In a recent study information on group therapy alliance using GQ was tested as a feature of clinical feedback during the treatment process (Burlingame et al., 2018). In this study, therapeutic relationship predicted improvement in outcome and the feedback during the process reversed relationship deterioration. Such positive results are of expanded interest if replicated in studies of PD treatment.

Strengths and limitations

A strength of this study is the data comes from a large and representative sample of patients with PDs and PD traits, where borderline and avoidant PD are the most prevalent diagnoses. A reasonable methodological concern is our inability to test the within- and between- group levels due to

missing information on group membership. However, since the analyses only address relationships between measures at a specific point in time, we do not consider this a major threat to the validity of the findings. In a longitudinal, or effect study, this would be more serious. A substantial amount of missing data might represent a possible bias affecting the results and inferences from this study, but our analysis of this possible bias did not confirm this concern. Further support is found in the replication of factor analyses reported by former studies leading us to conclude that the findings from this study may be generalized to other comparable patient samples. However, the parameter novel use of sub-facet estimates call for replication in future research since the findings may be unique to PD samples or the methods employed by this study. Furthermore, there is a possibility that estimated sub-facet scores on *Negative Relationship* to the leader (NRL) might be underestimated due to fewer patients with PaPD in the current study sample.

Conclusion

From the overall findings of this study it is reasonable to conclude that GQ constitutes a theoretically coherent and reliable measure of group relations, also applicable in a sample of PD patients. By this, the conditions are laid for further studies of validity and clinical utility of GQ in group-based treatment of patients with PD. A reliable measure enables further and much needed process-outcome research in group-based treatment of PD. Such research may importantly engender further understanding of appropriate treatment durations, frameworks and structuring elements in group therapies and comprehensive treatments combining modalities for a population of poorly functioning patients. In particular, process-outcome research in sufficiently powered studies may increase the evidence-base concerning treatment differentiation according to type of personality problems, overall levels of personality functioning, capacity for social cognition and maladaptive styles of attachment.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Ole Klungsøyr at Department for Research and Innovation, Clinic for Mental Health and Addiction, Oslo University Hospital for statistical advice and assistance, and the patients and

staff from the following units of the Norwegian Network for Personality Disorders for their contribution to this study:

Unit for Group Therapy, Øvre Romerike District Psychiatric Center, Akershus University Hospital, Jessheim; Group Therapy Unit, Nedre Romerike District Psychiatric Center, Akershus University Hospital, Lillestrøm; Group Therapy Unit, Follo District Psychiatric Center, Akershus University Hospital, Ski; Group Therapy Unit, Groruddalen District Psychiatric Center, Akershus University Hospital, Oslo; Clinic for Personality disorders, Outpatient Clinic for Specialized Treatment of Personality Disorders, Section for Personality psychiatry and specialized treatments, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo; Group Therapy Unit, Lovisenberg District Psychiatric Center, Lovisenberg Hospital, Oslo; Group Therapy Team, Vinderen Psychiatric Center, Diakonhjemmet Hospital, Oslo; Unit of Personality psychiatry, Vestfold District Psychiatric Center, Sandefjord; Unit for Intensive Group Therapy, Aust-Agder District Psychiatric Center, Sørlandet Hospital, Arendal; Unit for Group Therapy, District Psychiatric Center, Strømme, Sørlandet Hospital, Kristiansand; Group Therapy Unit, Stavanger District Psychiatric Center, Stavanger University Hospital, Stavanger; Section for group treatment, Kronstad District Psychiatric Center, Haukeland University Hospital, Bergen; MBT Team, Department of Substance Abuse Medicine, Haukeland universitetssjukehus, Bergen; and MBT-Team, Outpatient Clinic, Rogaland A-senter, Stavanger.

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Table 1. Overview of treatment during the last six months prior to one-year assessment		
<i>Treatment category</i>	<i>Specification of treatment</i>	<i>Percent*</i>
Manual-based PD treatment programs combining group and individual modalities	Mentalization-based Treatment (MBT)	40
	Schema-focused Therapy	9
	Dialectical Behavioral Therapy	1
Stand alone or preparatory before MBT	MBT psychoeducation	2
Other group-based therapies, stand-alone and individualized combinations with other groups/ individual therapy	Psychodynamic Group Therapy	31
	Physical activity group	2
	Body awareness group	2
	Art Therapy	2
	Stabilization group (trauma therapy)	1
	Metacognitive Interpersonal Therapy	3
Individual therapies stand-alone or in individualized combination with groups	Individual psychodynamic therapy	13
	Individual cognitive therapy	3
	Metacognitive Interpersonal Therapy	1
	Supportive therapy	1
	Trauma exposure therapy	1
	Other approaches	6
*) Valid percent (n=288)		

Table 2. Diagnostic prevalence		
<i>Symptom disorders:</i>	n	%*
Current major depressive disorder	136	48
Major depressive disorder in remission	25	9
Dysthymic disorder	38	13
Bipolar II	12	4
Panic without agoraphobia	22	8
Panic with agoraphobia	25	9
Agoraphobia without panic	10	4
Social phobia	68	24
Obsessive-Compulsive disorder	9	3
Generalized anxiety disorder	45	16
PTSD	27	10
Alcohol dependence/abuse	25	9
Substance dependence/abuse	17	6
Eating disorders	27	10
No symptom disorder	25	7
<i>Personality disorders:</i>		
Paranoid	19	6
Borderline	116	34
Avoidant	146	43
Dependent	18	5
Obsessive-Compulsive	15	4
PD NOS ¹	18	5
No PD disorder	83	24
*) Diagnoses occurring in less than 3% omitted. Valid percent reported (n=369). ¹) PD NOS: Personality disorder not otherwise specified.		

Figure 1. Conceptual GQ model with CFA parameters

Appendix 1. Organization of GQ items

Positive Bond

Group (PBG) – “Climate”

26. The members liked and cared about each other
27. The members felt what was happening was important and there was a sense of participation
28. We cooperate and work together in group
29. Even though we have differences, our group feels secure to me.
30. The group members accept one another

Leaders (PBL) – “Alliance”

1. I felt that I could trust the group leaders during today's session
3. The group leaders and I respect each other
5. I feel the group leaders care about me even when I do things that they do not approve of
7. The group leaders were friendly and warm toward me

Members (PBM) – “Cohesion”

2. I felt that I could trust the other group members during today's session
4. The other group members and I respect each other
6. I feel the other group members care about me even when I do things that they do not approve of
8. The other group members were friendly and warm toward me

Positive Work

Leaders (PWL) – “Task/Goals”

9. The group leaders and I agree about the things I will need to do in therapy
11. The group leaders and I agree on what is important to work on
13. The group leaders and I have established an understanding of the kind of changes that would be good for me
15. The group leaders and I are working together toward mutually agreed upon goals

Members (PWM) – “Task/Goals”

10. The other group members and I agree about the things I will need to do in therapy
12. The other group members and I agree on what is important to work on
14. The other group members and I have established a good understanding of the kind of changes that would be good for me
16. The other group members and I are working together toward mutually agreed upon goals

Negative Relationship

Group (NRG) – “Conflict”

23. There was friction and anger between the members
24. The members were distant and withdrawn from each other
25. There was tension and anxiety between the members

Leaders (NRL) – “Alliance Rupture”

17. Sometimes the group leaders did not seem to be completely genuine
19. The group leaders did not always seem to care about me
21. The group leaders did not always understand the way I felt inside

Members (NRM) – “Empathic Failure”

18. Sometimes the other group members did not seem to be completely genuine
20. The other group members did not always seem to care about me
22. The other group members did not always understand the way I felt inside