

Group by Christie Tate

Christie O. Tate is a Chicago-based writer and essayist who grew up in Texas and attended law school in Chicago. Her work has been published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *McSweeney's*, and elsewhere. Her debut memoir, *Group: How One Therapist and a Circle of Strangers Saved My Life*, was a Read Between the Ravines title. She has also written *B.F.F.: A Memoir of Friendship Lost and Found*.

1. Christie Tate begins *Group* by describing the first time she “wished for death.” She spends the rest of Chapter 1 describing the contrasts of her life—an unwitting outsider might assume she has it all, yet internally she struggles with profound loneliness. What did you think about the opening scene? Did it surprise you that Tate could struggle so much with her self-worth given her success?
2. One of Tate’s biggest reservations about participating in Dr. Rosen’s group is the fact that secrets are discouraged. What did you think of this policy? How does this central tenet of Dr. Rosen’s group sessions affect how Tate interacts with and forms relationships with her fellow group members?
3. Dr. Rosen’s methods are unorthodox, and Tate expresses doubt about their effectiveness throughout the memoir. At one point, she even says, “I believed Dr. Rosen was courageous, smart, and gifted at treating addicts like me. But now I worried that he was something else: deeply flawed and possibly negligent. Maybe even dangerous.” Discuss Dr. Rosen and his methods. Did you share Tate’s concerns while reading? Do you think Dr. Rosen ever oversteps boundaries or becomes too invasive? How do you feel about the way he handles the situation when Tate dates his other group therapy patients, Jeremy and Reed?
4. Do you agree with how Dr. Rosen distinguishes between keeping a secret, which is toxic, and maintaining privacy or having boundaries, which is not necessarily unhealthy? Does his practice of discouraging secrets help the group members make genuine connections with one another or does it encourage gossip?
5. In Chapter 6, Tate describes how once during a therapy session, no one says a single word for the entire ninety minutes. What was Dr. Rosen’s intent with this exercise? Is this kind of silence productive or a waste of time?
6. Tate recounts the dysfunctional and frustrating details of several romantic and sexual encounters throughout the memoir, including relationships with Jeremy, Alex, Reed, and Brandon. Why is she so candid and forthcoming with all of the intimate details of these relationships? Discuss what she learns from each former boyfriend and how she carries those lessons forward both in her love life and her life in general.

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7. When Tate leaves an indignant voicemail on Dr. Rosen’s answering machine, he uses the moment to “celebrate” her anger. What are the benefits of uplifting feelings that are, in Tate’s words, “ugly, irrational, petty, reckless, spiteful, and spewing”? How does expressing this anger affect her relationships with Dr. Rosen and the group? How does learning to embrace her “ugly” feelings help Tate?
8. At one point, Tate and Max engage in an intense fight in front of Dr. Rosen and the other group members during a session, but at the end of the chapter, they reconcile with a wordless hug. At other times, Tate and other group members yell, argue, and even break things during sessions. How do these moments of catharsis influence Tate’s feelings about and openness towards relationships?
9. At the end of Chapter 24, Tate joins a third group and begins going to therapy three times a week. She is unsure about this at first, saying, “And there was also suspicion that Dr. Rosen just wanted my money—I was vulnerable and making six figures. He could be offering me a way to get where I wanted to go or using me as a cash cow to finance a sailboat. How could I know which it was?” What did you think about her decision to join yet another group? Did you ever question Dr. Rosen’s motives?
10. Soon after Tate vows to say “yes” more and reclaim her voice in her daily life, she reaches out to John, resulting at long last in a healthy, loving relationship. In what ways is Tate’s therapy about understanding and respecting herself? How do those two concepts—connecting with others and understanding yourself—interact?
11. The three parts of *Group* correspond to the three groups that Tate joins along her therapy journey. Reflect back on how Tate and her approach to the struggles she faces evolve over the course of the book. What are some key moments from the narrative that demonstrate to you that group therapy is working for Tate?
12. After reading *Group*, why do you think Tate felt moved to share her experience? Did the book change any preconceived notions you had about group therapy? Would you ever be open to trying group therapy after reading this book? Why or why not?
13. How do you think Tate’s other group members feel about being included in her book? Despite Dr. Rosen’s “no secrets” policy, do you think anyone really expected their experiences to be shared with a much wider audience? What about Tate’s former boyfriends? Does someone writing a memoir owe the people in their life any privacy?
14. The memoir concludes with Tate and John’s wedding, a celebration that Tate has finally achieved what she set out to do when starting therapy—form healthy and lasting relationships. Given that, why does Tate choose to include a “Ten Years Later” epilogue where she shares that she is still going to group therapy? Why do you think she has continued going to therapy for so many years?