The SAGE Encyclopedia of Theory in Counseling and Psychotherapy

Group Analysis

Contributors: Dale C. Godby & Earl Hopper & Meg Sharpe
Editors: Edward S. Neukrug
Book Title: The SAGE Encyclopedia of Theory in Counseling and Psychotherapy
Chapter Title: "Group Analysis"
Pub. Date: 2015
Access Date: April 16, 2015
Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc.
City: Thousand Oaks,
Print ISBN: 9781452274126
Online ISBN: 9781483346502
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346502.n159
Print pages: 468-472

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

This PDF has been generated from SAGE knowledge. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346502.n159
Group analysis views the essential nature of humans to be social, both unconsciously and consciously. From this perspective, the individual person is as compelled by social forces as by those of the id, and defends against their recognition. In fact, group analysts refer to the “social unconscious,” defined in terms of the existence of social, cultural, and communicational arrangements of which people are unaware. Our psychological problems originate between people, and our symptoms disguise what cannot be communicated in our relationships. Group analysis helps people translate their disguised symptoms into interpersonal communication. Their symptoms come to be located in the dynamic matrix of the group. Patients collectively constitute the norm from which they individually deviate. In this way, “normal” reactions are reinforced, while “abnormal” reactions in time are modified. Uniquely, group analysis focuses on small (6–12 members), median (12–30), and large (30–400) groups. It is generally accepted that personal therapy is available in small as well as median and large groups. However, these larger groups also provide sociotherapy for organizations and even for societies as wholes.

Historical Context

S. H. Foulkes (1898–1976), a German psychoanalyst who also studied Gestalt psychology with Kurt Goldstein, founded group analysis, or group analytic psychotherapy, as it is otherwise known. Adapting the ideas of Goldstein, who championed the importance of considering the whole person when addressing traumatic brain injuries, and of the sociologist Norbert Ellias, who insisted that it was impossible to understand the experiences of individual persons outside the context of their social milieu, Foulkes began to look at the individual within the context of all of his relationships—family, social, cultural, political, and historical—and also emphasized the importance of historical and cultural continuity in the interactions of people who meet face-to-face in a group.

Foulkes fled Nazi Germany and arrived in England in 1933. There, he began integrating psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, and sociology to develop a method for treating people in small groups. During World War II, when he was posted at Northfield Military Hospital, near Birmingham, England, he had a chance to use some of his group ideas

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

to work with the returning soldiers. After the war, he started meeting with colleagues interested in group work. In 1952, he started the Group Analytic Society. Around 1960, Foulkes and a group of colleagues formed a private practice in London that eventually became known as the Group Analytic Practice.

In 1967, *Group Analysis: The International Journal of Group-Analytic Psychotherapy*, was begun under the editorship of Foulkes. As interest in group analysis grew, a need for training developed, and this was met by the founding of the Institute of Group Analysis in London in 1971. Today, group analytic training is available in many European countries, and the European Group Analytic Training Institutions Network provides opportunities for dialogue and exchange between the training institutions.

Group analysis has been supported by three important book series: (1) *The International Library of Group Psychotherapy and Group Process*, edited by Malcolm Pines and Earl Hopper; (2) *The International Library of Group Analysis*, edited by Malcolm Pines; and (3) *The New Library of Group, Analysis*, edited by Earl Hopper.

In 2011, the Group Analytic Society was renamed the Group Analytic Society International, and today, it maintains an informative website and coordinates many group analysis activities, including a conference meeting every third year in a different European city.

Group analysis has been a dynamic and developing field for nearly 75 years. Harold Behr and Liesel Hearst's book *Group-Analytic Psychotherapy* is a good place to begin exploring group analysis in depth. It contains an extensive bibliography that includes contributions that are necessarily left out of a brief article like this. Jason Maratos has recently edited a comprehensive book of articles by group analysts that conveys the depth and scope of the field.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Group analysis is based on a number of traditional psychoanalytical concepts as well as knowledge of **[p. 468 ↓]** groups and systems. It differs from psychoanalysis in its emphasis on the social nature of the individual. Group analysis sees the individual as

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

an abstraction who can only be understood in context. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, and sociology, Foulkes valued many viewpoints. He understood the communication in a group to occur on several levels: (a) current relationships, (b) individual transference relationships, (c) projected feelings and fantasies, and (d) the primordial level of archetypal universal images. The group analyst's dilemma is where to focus attention amid these multiple levels of complexity.

Theory can be helpful when considering where and when to intervene. Group analysis has developed a number of important theoretical additions since Foulkes's original contributions. Pines, who is considered Foulkes's successor, has also functioned in an integrative way through his teaching, writing, supervising, and editing. He brought self psychology into the realm of group analysis. Meg Sharpe introduced the experience and the study of the large group to the American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA), and she and Pines coled the first large group at AGPA in 1995.

A number of important theoretical developments have been made in group analysis. Earl Hopper theorized the nature of the social unconscious in group and organizational life. Especially interested in traumatized groups and traumatogenic processes in general, he argues that a traumatized group has experienced a failure of dependency so that the members feel helpless and fear annihilation. The group becomes incohesive, unable to accomplish its tasks. The members become isolated from one another; they become a collection of encapsulated individuals, or an *aggregate*. Aggregates oscillate with *masses*, which exhibit a oneness in beliefs and values. Hopper represents this situation with the formula (ba) I:A/M, translated as the basic assumption of Incohesion: Aggregation/Massification. He considers this to be the fourth basic assumption of groups, adding to Wilfred Bion's original three basic assumptions: (1) dependency, (2) fight-or-flight, and (3) pairing.

Morris Nitsun developed the idea of the antigroup as a counterpoint to Foulkes's emphasis on the positive impact of groups. Nitsun examines the destructive forces in groups and their creative potential. Naming and understanding the antigroup has been useful in identifying the forces that discourage students from running groups and individuals from joining therapy groups, challenging them to find ways to transform the destructive forces into something useful. In his book *The Group as an Object of Desire:*

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Exploring Sexuality in Group Therapy, Nitsun invites the group analyst to pay attention to sexuality and desire, which have often been marginalized in group work.

Farhad Dalal applies his group analysis ideas to an understanding of racial conflicts, in which he sees the psyche as "colour coded" and the concept of race as being used by the powerful to perpetuate their position. He emphasizes what he calls the "radical" Foulkes—the one who argued that the "we" precedes the "I." Tom Ormay further developed this idea, giving it a name, "nos" or the "we," adding the "nos" to Freud's psychic structure of the id, ego, and superego.

Major Concepts

Some major concepts of note in group analysis include Foulkes's basic law of group dynamics, conductor, matrix, mirroring, condenser phenomenon, resonance, and ego training in action.

Foulkes's Basic Law of Group Dynamics

Foulkes understood the healing power in groups as deriving from group members' tendency to reinforce one another's normal reactions and wear down and correct one another's neurotic reactions. He saw that the members of the group collectively constitute the very norm from which they individually deviate.

Conductor

Based on the metaphor of an orchestra and its conductor, Foulkes favored the term *conductor* to describe the group analyst. *Führer*, meaning "leader" or "guide" in German, Foulkes's first language, was an emotionally laden term used almost exclusively in Germany as an epithet for Hitler. "Conductor" also fits Foulkes's understanding of group leadership. The conductor's authority is located in relationship with and in the context of the orchestral **[p. 469 ↓]** members who make the music. Each member brings

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

something of his or her individuality to the score to create resonances with the others, while simultaneously being influenced and nudged as needed by the conductor.

Matrix

The concept of dynamic matrix is used to describe all of the relationships within a group. Each group member influences and is influenced by the web of communication that constitutes the matrix. The matrix can be positive, like a nurturing mother, or more negative, like a spider's web. It is the group analyst's job to maintain a healthy matrix. Foulkes also used the term *foundational matrix* to characterize our common social– cultural–biological background. This common background, both conscious and unconscious, is vitally important in understanding one another.

Mirroring

Foulkes compared the group to a hall of mirrors in which group members could see rejected and split-off parts of themselves in others. As members see themselves in others, they become better able to integrate those split-off parts of themselves. Pines described three forms of mirroring: (1) antagonistic, (2) dialogic, and (3) the absence of mirroring. At times, what is seen in the other is violently rejected and a destructive cycle ensues, resulting in deep tensions between members. Louis Zinkin used the concept of malignant mirroring to describe the pathological attraction that arises between two members who get into a standoff with one another.

Condenser Phenomenon

The group amplifies, loosens, and stimulates, as well as concentrates, the interactions of the group members. This happens at the conscious, the individual unconscious, and the social unconscious level.

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Resonance

The group, for Foulkes, resembled strings that vibrate and reinforce one another. Each member resonates in the key to which he or she is attuned. This is easily observed when an event in a group sets off startling, different resonances in each of its members.

Ego Training in Action

Freud's understanding of the ego being strengthened through analysis is carried into the group situation, where the ego is actively engaged by the various group members. In the context of the group, one's defenses are activated, and one gets a chance to try new behaviors that are more adaptable. This experience brings the members one step closer to life outside the group.

Techniques

The foundation of the group analyst's technique is the therapeutic alliance with each group member, in which acceptance, empathic attunement, and genuineness are all important. The primary purpose of the group analyst's technique is to help group members make emotional contact to understand and achieve the conscious and unconscious goals that brought them to therapy. Based on this foundation, David Kennard and his colleagues have outlined a number of techniques used by group analysts, each of which is discussed in the following subsections.

Maintenance

Often referred to as dynamic administration, maintenance involves deciding where the group meets, how the chairs are arranged, who joins the group and when and how messages are delivered from absent group members, time boundaries, fees, and guidelines for the outside contact of group members. Although group analysts differ in

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

how each of these matters are dealt with, they generally agree that it is important to pay attention to their dynamic significance.

Open Facilitation

Open facilitation refers to interventions used to move the group forward that are not based on a specific hypothesis. Open-ended questions like “Can you tell us more about that?” is one example.

Guided Facilitation

Guided facilitation refers to remarks that are not simply open-ended but have a specific hypothesis in mind; for example, “The tone you used makes me wonder if you are angry.”

Interpretation

The conductor makes interpretations when he or she believes that they will deepen and extend the scope and depth of understanding of the personal, interpersonal, and group dynamics. These interpretations may be made to the individual, a subgroup, or the group as a whole. The group affords opportunities to see and understand horizontal transferences toward peers, perhaps as siblings, as well as vertical transferences to the conductor, perhaps as a parent. Because group analysis sees the essence of persons as social, there is often a focus on ways in which history, culture, and ethnicity contribute to the problem or serve to defend against seeing the problem. Group analysis is the treatment of the person in the group, of the group, and by the group, including the conductor. In this process, the conductor leaves as much as possible to the group.

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

No Immediate Response

During the course of a group, especially as it matures, the conductor may remain silent, reserving the right to intervene later depending on further developments. “Trust the group” is a phrase often heard in group analysis and refers to the confidence the conductor places in the group as a whole to work with whatever comes up.

Therapeutic Process

The type of group that forms the foundation of group analysis is referred to as a slow-open group of seven to nine members. As members achieve their goals, they graduate from the group, and new members join. Typically, one or two members leave and join the group every year or two. Members who benefit most from the group typically stay for 2 or more years. In general, groups meet weekly for 90 minutes for 40 weeks per year, taking off for holidays and a break in the summer.

Group analysts agree that most people can profit from an appropriate group, whereas only some can profit from individual therapy. The group is often seen as wiser and more powerful than any one individual. Group is seen as more *and* less than individual treatment, and the two are seen as complementary to one another.

Pat de Maré extended our understanding of median groups and large groups. The large group is sometimes described as a group you cannot take into view with a single glance. De Mare experimented with groups of various sizes and thought about them from a group analysis perspective. He especially championed the median group, seeing it as existing since the beginning of civilization, when the elders of the community met to decide issues important to them and their citizens. He argued that the small group often contains dynamics similar to those of the family and focuses on *insight*, whereas the median group focuses on wider issues, such as gender, politics, social class, and ethnicity, that have shaped who we are, and thus, it focuses on *outsight*. De Maré believed that the small group focuses on socializing the individual, whereas the median group focuses on humanizing society.

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

The large group is often available in training settings or at group conferences. It is especially helpful in giving individuals an experience of observing themselves when there is a threat to their individual identity. How does one find a voice or become a member in such a large group? Anxieties related to developing as a mature citizen arise when in the context of the large group. Silently voting is the most common experience many have in a large group. Dialogue is encouraged in large groups convened from a group analysis perspective. Some vote, however, by leaving or trivializing the process. Some stay, deal with their anger, frustration, and disappointment, and find their way to dialogue and *koinonia*, or "impersonal fellowship," as de Mare would describe it.

All group members actively engage in treatment. All participate, respond, understand, and interpret. The conductor is responsible for monitoring and maintaining the boundaries of the group. Sharpe, in writing about self-disclosure, encourages the group analyst to resist the temptation to give group members personal information that might not contribute to and might divert or impede the **[p. 471 ↓]** development of the group or the individuals within it. While the conductor works to maintain safety within the group, he or she leaves as much as possible to the group. Everything that happens involves the group as a whole as well as each individual. The individual is a nodal point in the group matrix, a spokesman for the group as well as for himself or herself. All communications—verbal and nonverbal, conscious and unconscious—are relevant. The aim of the group is insight plus adjustment, through what is referred to as ego training in action. This is achieved through social processes such as mirroring, resonance, and condenser phenomena, as well as the modification of individual resistance and defenses. In the group, ego boundaries can be loosened and individuals can rediscover and redefine themselves. More of the individuals and their energies can be made available for creative expression of themselves and their involvement with others. One way to think about therapeutic progress is to see the group members moving from being made by history to making history. They learn to know and express their individual identities in relationship to and with regard for others. They become citizens in the deepest meaning of that word.

See alsoModern Analytic Group Therapy; Psychodynamic Group Psychotherapy; Relational Group Psychotherapy; Tavistock Group Training Approach

Dale C.Godby EarlHopper MegSharpe

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346502.n159
Further Readings

Behr, H., & Hearst, L. (2005). Group-analytic psychotherapy: A meeting of minds . London, England: Whurr.

Dalal, F. (2002). Race, colour and the processes of racialization: New perspectives from group analysis, psychoanalysis and sociology . London, England: Routledge.

Foulkes, S. H. (1986). Group-Analytic psychotherapy: Method and principles . London, England: Karnac Books. (Original work published 1975)

Hopper, E. (2003). Traumatic experience in the unconscious life of groups: The fourth basic assumption: Incohesion: Aggregation/massification or (ba) I:A/M . London, England: Jessica Kingsley.

Hopper, E. (Ed.). (2012). Trauma and organizations . London, England: Karnac Books.

Hopper, E., & Weinberg, H. (Eds.). (2011). The social unconscious in persons, groups, and societies: Vol. 1. Mainly theory . London, England: Karnac Books.

Kennard, D., Roberts, J., & Winter, D. A. (Eds.). (1993). A work book of group-analytic interventions . London, England: Routledge.

Maratos, J. (Ed.). (2014). Group analysis for the 21st century: A book of foundational readings . London, England: Karnac Books.

Nitsun, M. (1996). The anti-group: Destructive forces in the group and their creative potential . London, England: Routledge.

Nitsun, M. (2006). The group as an object of desire: Exploring sexuality in group therapy . London, England: Routledge.

Pines, M. (1998). Circular reflections: Selected papers on group analysis and psychoanalysis . London, England: Jessica Kingsley.

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Sharpe, M. (Ed.). (1995). The third eye: Supervision of analytic groups . London, England: Routledge.

Weinberg, H. (2014). The paradox of Internet groups: Alone in the presence of virtual others . London, England: Karnac Books.