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Group Analysis in the USA

Dale Godby, PhD; Haim Weinberg PhD; Lauren E. Storck, Ph.D; Robert Hsiung, MD

Dale C. Godby

I have been in Dallas, Texas since 1981 and I am most familiar with the ways in which group analysis has influenced group work in Dallas. To get an understanding of group analysis in other places throughout the US I wrote to current members of GASi and asked for their input. Their comments are included below along with their names.

I trained in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Topeka, Kansas and was primarily exposed to the American way of doing group psychotherapy. Yalom and Rutan and Stone were the primary textbooks. Some of my teachers invited me to AGPA and around 1985 I heard Malcolm Pines give a workshop on shame. I was young and just starting out in practice. The thing I remember most is his describing the Group Analytic Practice in London and saying they met their groups 40 weeks per year and took off 12 weeks. In Washington DC in the early 90's prior to an American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA) meeting Earl Hopper and Malcolm Pines did a two-day large group/small group workshop. This was my first large group. In 1995 Meg Sharpe invited Malcolm Pines to run the first large group at AGPA. By then I was reading *The Practice of Group Analysis* edited by Jeff Roberts and Malcolm Pines. That first large group at AGPA was fascinating and intensified my interest in Group Analysis and afterwards I spoke with Meg who told me she had a son in New Orleans. She visited him regularly and after talking it over with a local Dallas psychiatrist friend, Bob Bennett, we decided to invite her to come to

Dallas as often as she could from New Orleans. Bob, Melissa Black, a local psychologist, and Myrna Little, a psychologist office mate and myself all started meeting with Meg and any interested. We developed a consulting relationship with her over the next 15 years until her retirement. We meet monthly by phone and in person whenever she got near to Dallas.

Meg Sharpe

Meg Sharpe and Earl Hopper participated at our invitation in a weekend workshop on *Ethics, Organizational Trauma, and Hope* in 2007. As a part of that workshop, they both led small groups and conducted a couple of large groups. Myrna, Melissa, Bob, and I began a practice together modeled after Meg's London practice and call ourselves the Group Analytic Practice of Dallas. Over the years we have attended the triennial Group Analytic Society meetings and presented and run small groups. Three of us have run twice weekly groups as well as many once weekly groups. We currently teach in the psychiatry residency at the local medical school and run T-groups for all four years of training and a large group for all 50 residents 4 times per year. The psychiatry residency has regular grand rounds meetings to which we have invited Haim Weinberg, Richard Billow, and Jerry Gans, all who have published books in the New Library of Group Analysis (NILGA) edited by Early Hopper. Today we have 5 psychiatrists and 2 psychologists that are members or associates of the Group Analytic Practice of Dallas who all participate in the residency group training.

This is a summary of what is happening in Dallas around Group Analysis. The question I have is, why has a group analytic training program not grown up in Dallas like the ones in London, Germany, Portugal, Norway, Greece, Serbia and other countries? My answer is that in the States we are all licensed to practice by the individual states. Training institutions grant certificates, but they don't license you like the state does and the state licensing is connected to university and graduate education. So, our students get their exposure and authorization to practice based on what they have done at the university. This means that by the time the student has graduated they are authorized to practice and be reimbursed by insurance. This means group analytic training would be on top of what they have already done. This discourages the pool of candidates who would look to be authorized by a group analytic training institution. Bob Hsiung, who you will meet here a bit later has wondered why this is not the case for all the individual

psychoanalytic institutes in the US. They also authorize psychoanalysis to be practiced by therapists who have been licensed and authorized by their state. It is clearly an issue that deserves some further thought.

Haim Weinberg

When I moved to the USA from Israel in 2006, I was already a group analyst, being trained by mostly British group analysts who came to Israeli every few months for block training. I was also one of the founders of the Israeli Institute of group analysis, and quite involved with the GASi, coming to its tri-annual symposiums since 1999. Group analysis became quite popular in Israel, bypassing Bion's approach that was more in the therapeutic vogue up to the end of the 20th century (together with some American Rogerian approaches). I started participating in the annual conference of the American Group Psychotherapy Association since 1997, first coming every year from Israel, and then continuing to participate from the States. You can imagine my surprise when I found out that group analysis almost does not exist in the US. The most popular North American group approaches that were represented at the AGPA were Yalom's interpersonal (focusing mainly on the here-and-now), Lou Ormont's Modern Group Analysis (despite its name, its resemblance to Foulkes' group analysis is minimal, since the style of the group leader is very active and their position is very central), and Agazarian's System Centered Therapy (SCT, focusing on functional subgroups, with quite a structured way of leading the group). In addition, there were psychodynamic approaches, but none of them saw the individual as embedded in the social matrix, as GA did.

Group analysis at the AGPA conference was represented by British group analysts whose presentations introduced GA ideas to North America therapists. Since 1996, Malcom Pines and Meg Sharpe convened the Large Group at the AGPA annual meetings. Later, Earl Hoppe replaced Malcolm. The structure was very along the conference, some quite short and in inconvenient times (3 meetings of one hour early mornings at first, changed to 75 minutes early morning the first day, lunch time on the second day and 2.5 hours on the third day), while other presentations took place at the same time, probably reflecting the ambivalence of the organization towards this strange beast and the GA approach. Since 2006, the AGPA decided that the conveners rotate every two years, and several other group analysts had the opportunity to conduct the LG (Felix Mendelssohn, Robi Friedman, Thor Kristian Island & Siri Jones, Anne Lindhart & Gerda Winther, and myself – Haim Weinberg). Most of them also gave other presentations that introduced group analysis to the audience (Earl Hopper was a regular presenter and involved with the AGPA committees. John Schlapobersky joined these presentations later).

Around 2001, Lauren Storck, a US psychotherapist, established a Special Interest Group (SIG) on Group Analysis and Large Groups at the AGPA. I remember the opening meeting, that included several dozens of people, and the excitement of the participants. Malcolm Pines and Earl Hopper were there too. Not a lot of activities followed. None of the above presentations and activities succeeded in bringing group analysis to the North American group therapeutic community or establishing group analytic centers in

the USA (except for Dale Godby's venture in Dallas). Why? In my opinion the answer can be found in the Social Unconscious of the people of this country. The emphasis on individualism is deeply rooted in the foundation matrix of North America. It contradicts some of the main premises of group analysis. How can this individualistic approach go together with Foulkes' idea that "the individual is just an abstract", or Farhad Dallal's idea that "there is no such a thing as an individual"? "America" is still waiting for a group analytic training that will distribute Foulkes ideas to a large number of US group therapists.

Lauren E. Storck

Group Analysis appealed to this American woman upon discovering it in London around 1980. At that time, I was recently licensed in clinical psychology in the US, after earlier work in brain -behavior connections. The magnetic threads of the GA fabric were the social, cultural and intellectual roots of Foulkes, and what I knew about my grandparents, all immigrants to new worlds. GA's inclusion of multiple professional backgrounds had appeal also.

I was actively involved while living there for about 10 years, and a few years beyond that. Writing for the GA Journal, serving on that Board, taking workshops/supervision at the IGA, attending conferences, and importantly, the inter-cultural and several large group experiences all stretched my personal and professional horizons.

GA seemed a close cousin to Sullivanian, existential and interpersonal psychology that had my attention in the US. Foulkes' saying that there are no individuals other than the groups that define them (my paraphrase) rang true. This however was to be a challenge to explain to an American audience, however sophisticated they were.

Returning to the US, and as clinical faculty at Harvard Medical School, I wove aspects of group analysis into supervision, gave a few "grand rounds" focused on GA or closely related socio-cultural topics. There was interest of course. Group analysts from the UK presented at American conferences. At the same time, there were long-established group practitioners of many stripes in the US, and large organizations to represent group work (group dynamics) in different ways.

Haim reminds me in his essay that I convened a special interest group in the AGPA for GA and Large Groups. As he says, it was not sustained over time. I now also recall that Mark Ettin and I offered a large group at a New York meeting of EGPA.

GA as a separate and uniquely GA practice however, in my view, could not stand out from the crowd. GA was not seen as significantly different from group work being taught, for one example, via the AGPA, the large group psychotherapy organization which had several sub-groups in different parts of the country. There were, no doubt, competitive complexities.

My memory is that parts of GA theory and practice were adopted by several US practitioners, and woven into whatever sort of group work they were doing. I'm sure GA enriched those groups.

After years of clinical practice (teaching and writing also) in the Boston area, I did late-life post-doctoral research in social gerontology (in-depth analysis, informed by GA, of online group work). My husband and I also published a few papers in management journals that used GA theory, in part, to explore leadership and community-of-practice issues. My understanding of GA continues to be applied, even if thinly, to several community and non-profit groups, especially related to healthcare, eldercare, and hearing loss.

May our nourishing internal and external group dynamics continue to sustain us and others, in confronting modern authoritarian, mob and destructive forces.

P.S. In terms of American culture being individualistic – yes. At the same time, the UK culture is described as individualistic also. The size, spread, and diversity of American society breeds many individual and group dynamics that will "resist" a wider understanding and adoption of GA in the USA.

Robert Hsiung

Dale Godby asked me to contribute to this American perspective. I share with him being introduced to GASi by a group analyst visiting the US from the UK, in my case, Frances Griffiths. Frances and I connected at a couple AGPA annual meetings; in 2015, we exchanged emails; the next time I was in London, she gave me a tour of the GASi office; and in 2016, she sponsored my application for membership.

Frances Griffiths

Wait, that wasn't my first introduction. That was how I became a member of GASi, but my first introduction was in 2014, when Haim Weinberg invited me to join him, David Glyn, and Luciano Colleoni on a panel at the Symposium in Lisbon.

Going back further, my first exposure to group analytic ideas had to have been on Haim's Group-Psychotherapy email list, which I joined in 2008, where, in addition to him, Earl Hopper, Marina Mojovic, Robi Friedman, and other group analysts posted.

Fast-forwarding, I played a role in the birth of the Alternative Large Group (ALG) from the pandemic Sunday Online Group Experience. The ALG has continued meeting every Sunday–for almost two years now. It's open, so I've invited American colleagues who aren't group analysts, including a subgroup from an A. K. Rice Institute meeting that "took a field trip" there and "returned" with some ALG members for a discussion.

I see the ALG as a developing intersection of the international group analysis, group relations, and group psychotherapy communities. At that intersection, group analysis is in the USA, and the USA is in group analysis.

In Summary, I, Dale Godby, would say as you can see from the above comments that group analysis has been noticed in the US and has had some influence, but primarily it has been absorbed and used by those in practice and teaching. It has been integrated into how group psychotherapy is practiced in the US but has not developed training institutions.

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