Introducing Median and Large Group in the Training of Psychiatrists

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In Dallas Texas, Group Analysis is essentially unknown, even among the highly educated mental health community. The Group Analytic Practice of Dallas developed out of Meg Sharpe and Malcolm Pines' introduction of the Large Group to the annual meeting of the American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA) in the early 1990s. After the first Large Group at AGPA, a group of interested Dallas psychologists and psychiatrists began a 15-year consulting relationship with Meg Sharpe, which led to the founding of the Group Analytic Practice of Dallas, (GAPDallas.com) modeled on GAP London. (Roberts and Pines 1991).

The members of GAPDallas all teach in the psychiatric residency program at the local medical school, The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. This is a four-year program with around 12 residents in each class. There is a tradition of having each class participate in a training group or T-group, which are conducted as experiential groups by the members of GAPDallas. The T-group leaders have a non-reporting relationship to the faculty who are responsible for evaluating the residents' progress. Through our consultations with Meg Sharpe and attending median and large groups at AGPA and GASi we have seen the value of these larger groups and have wanted to introduce them to the

residents. How to do this in an environment that has never heard of Group Analysis became our challenge.

We had a relationship with the administrative structure of the residency program that because of curriculum pressures were questioning the need for small group experiences for the residents. Our task was to persuade them to consider adding a median or large group experience to the training of the entire psychiatric residency program while maintaining the small groups. We suggested and eventually were approved to convene a median group 4 times per year at a time when ordinarily their small groups would meet.

All of the major textbooks on group psychotherapy discuss preparing patients for group. We have prepared the residents for the small group experience by reviewing and providing a copy of a brief paper by Len Horwitz, “Exciting Opportunities Ahead”, which explains what to expect and how best to use their small group experience. But we were unable to find something similar for preparing individuals for participation in median and large groups. Median and large groups are often offered in the context of psychotherapy training programs or group conferences. How should we prepare the residents in the context of a more general training program, especially one where even small groups are often considered a touchy feely waste of precious time in an already crowded curriculum?

I began by writing the following piece, which was directed at the participants of the planned median and large groups. As it evolved I realized I was also writing it to persuade the administration to see the importance and allow for making space for these larger groups. This is especially important as the chair of residency training is responsible to a department head who in turn is responsible to the dean who is responsible to the president of the medical school, which trains 1000 physicians. So we had to consider justifying median and larger groups in the context of a large and complicated educational structure. The document that follows was written to not only prepare the residents for the experience, but to persuade the powers that be to consider making space in the curriculum for the median and large group.

The document that follows is still evolving. I posted it on the GASi forum for feedback and a discussion involving 100 responses ensued, all of them very helpful. If anyone finds it useful please adapt and change it to fit your specific context and purpose. As you will see it is highly dependent on what has been written about median and large groups.

Reflective Residents' Project—Dialogue Groups

Inspired by Pat de Maré's work on Median Groups

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One of the beginnings of group therapy was when Michael Foulkes, a psychoanalyst, emigrated from Germany to London because of Jewish persecution before World War II. He was accepted into the London establishment of psychoanalysis and began seeing his patients. He wondered, after seeing his psychoanalytic patients, what it would be like if they all were seen together in a group. He put them in a group to find out. From the study of these groups we have learned a great deal over the years.

These small groups function to provide ***insight*** for the individual into themselves as they build relationships in the group. The small group often reproduces family dynamics, which is no wonder in that they are size of many families.

As group analysis developed the question was asked, “What happens to group dynamics when we increase the group size to 20 or 30 or even 100 members?” Group analysts began to study groups of this size and they have become known as median groups (20-40 members) and large groups (40-100 and larger). Median groups are something very ancient. In the Bible we read about the elders meeting in the city gate to decide matters related to the walled city. The gate of the city served for defense and as a “civic center”. (II Samuel 18-19) In groups of this size, issues related to citizenship became important. Family dynamics have an uncanny way of reappearing in these groups, which many of us have experienced in the church, synagogue, mosque, school, or city council meetings. Can we move away from the dynamics of the family and discuss issues of wider concern, concerns that Pat de Maré calls ***outsight?*** That is how do matters outside of ourselves make us who we are? These forces often compel us as strongly as our own id. What are these forces you might ask? They are issues like gender, politics, social class, ideologies, and faith. For instance what does it mean to be a woman at your institution? What role does ethnic, racial or international identity play in your experience? What about social class? Are there any poor among us? What sub-groups are you a part of? And how do

these subgroups relate to one another? Both insight and outsight are available in the small, median, and large group. The size of the group tends to emphasize one end of the continuum or the other.

In the median group and large group you are invited to explore how these and other issues have shaped you. De Maré sees the median and large group as humanizing society as distinct from the small group whose focus is more on socializing the individual. In the median group there is an opportunity to develop the art of acting in concert with others for the common good. In his book, *Koinonia*, he speaks about developing a passion for the state, a community of citizens, as distinct from love of family. Lionel Kreeger, writing in a special issue of *Group Analysis* (2000) dedicated to Pat de Maré states, “Koinonia refers to the development of impersonal fellowship rather than personal friendship, a culture of togetherness and amity, transforming the chaos of mindlessness and hate into more human communion.” As one moves out of the family, what does it mean to be a member of your institutional community, or a citizen of Dallas, Texas, the United States, or the World?

Therapy can be seen in the context of the dyad as in individual therapy. But we can also study the individual in the context of the family, Kin, or the larger extended family, Kith. The median group provides a space in which we can explore and be in dialogue about some of the larger forces that shape our sense of who we are. The size of a median group, often 20-40 people, can lead to frustration and even hatred, which ironically fuels dialogue and a sense of community for those who can stick with the process. To think and develop the art of dialogue in the median or large group requires practice and discipline. Pat de Maré never tired of extolling the virtues of these groups and argued that the only solution to mass violence was mass dialogue. In participating in the median group we hope to help you develop professional artistry. Artistry is needed when answers are unclear and there are many sides to an issue. Learning to think in

the context of uncertainty and chaos can enable you to become a reflective practitioner. (Howard, 1996)

Reading List

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