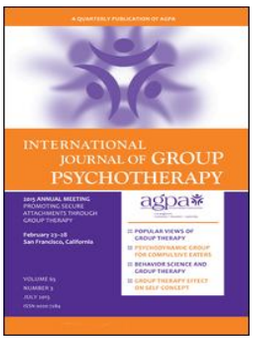

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Group Therapy: A Group-Analytic Approach

Dale C. Godby

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BOOK REVIEW

Check for updates

Group Therapy: A Group-Analytic Approach by Nick Barwick and Martin Weegmann. London: Routledge, 2018. 219 pp.

> The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community.
>
> William James, Great Men, Great Thoughts and Their Environment, *Atlantic Monthly*, 1880, *46*, 441–459.

In a fresh take on group analysis, this book makes room for the individual and the group. It will engage the experienced group therapist and leave the neophyte asking for more. Nick Barwick, the primary author, dedicates the book to the spirit of Jo Cox, a member of Parliament, who made room for the excluded, celebrated our common humanity, and was tragically murdered by a sick man who feared she was too welcoming to the stranger. The spirit of group analysis as described by Barwick melds well with Cox's vision for society.

Nick Barwick and Martin Weegmann are fourth-generation group analysts. Their book digests and integrates S. H. Foulkes's work with new developments in psychoanalysis and group analysis while integrating ideas from the poets and musicians who share their interest in harmony and integration. Foulkes is infrequently read in the United States and placing his work in the context of new developments helps us to see his importance and relevance. The first half of the book, written by Barwick, is focused on theory and, in a brief 100 pages, he offers a lucid summary of what group analysis is all about. The group according to Foulkes's works "towards *an ever more articulate form of communication* … " [italics in the original] (Foulkes, 1948/1983, p. 169). "An ever more articulate form of communication" is

a recurring idea that is used to understand the group processes of resonance, mirroring, exchange, and the various communicational levels – current, transference, projective, and primordial. The conductor intervenes to facilitate ever more articulate forms of communication. In this way the energy that has been invested in symptoms is translated into shared communication in the group.

The authors cover the standard group analytic ideas, which have been covered many other places. So why read this book? Because they frequently illustrate these ideas in a facile and ever more articulate way. They take a concept like "exchange" and, in the space of a page or two, draw out its meaning across a few generations of group analysts, philosophers, and infant observation researchers. Foulkes's ideas from 75 years ago, in the mind of a new generation of group analysts, makes them available for this time and place.

Comparing Foulkes (the mother approach) with Wilfred Bion (the other approach), the authors illustrate how group work is enhanced when they are thoughtfully integrated. The authors then move to more clinical matters, offering a dialogue between Weegmann and Barwick on working with(in) groups. In their lively discussion regarding how group works, they describe the essential qualities of the effective group analyst as empathy, authenticity, and trustworthiness, along with the capacity to cultivate a "culture of inquiry" and the ability to know when to support and when to stand back.

Barwick then presents one of the first groups that he conducted as a trainee. Like many of us, Barwick began his first group with six difficult patients who all brought significant antigroup tendencies. Amidst group members vying for attention, the group experienced an early drop out of a patient who attempted suicide between the second and third meetings. Shortly after this, Barwick had a dream in which the patients and their families crowded the room. He felt intensely anxious, invaded by unremitting chaos. He underwent a baptism by fire but, by the second and third years of the group, he began to claim his authority as conductor and his part in eliciting play. Barwick's entitled this chapter "Making Room," which refers to making room for patients as they join and begin to work in group, and to expanding one's emotional and mental repertoire of the therapist in becoming a group analyst.

Barwick's struggles with his group serve as an encouragement not only for the novice, but for us all. There is plenty of room for wrong moves. He cites the great jazz pianist, Bill Evans, "There are no wrong notes, only wrong resolutions." This brings to mind Franz Liszt, who referred to his wrong notes as "uninvited guests." Liszt incorporated these "uninvited guests" into the score to create something new, much like the uninvited unconscious parts of our group members are integrated into something new for the group, its members, and the conductor as well.

As one moves from individual to group work, one needs to develop a new identity as a group analyst. Something that could be clarified further is the intense training that occurs before achieving the status of a group analyst. A yearlong course with lectures and small and large group experiences is often required before being admitted to the formal training. Once admitted the candidate spends 3–5 years in a twice-weekly group, undertakes several years of course work, and must run a group of their own under supervision.

The book closes with reflections on endings. Barwick and Weegmann discuss the range of ways that patients leave group, from the premature to the planned. The discussion of unsatisfactory endings is a plus. All experienced therapists have had them, but often the ideal ending is emphasized, which can leave the new therapist feeling more of a failure than is realistic. Ticho (1972), who interviewed the therapists after the Menninger Psychotherapy Research Project, found many experienced practitioners remained concerned that analysis had not done enough to help their patients. Referring to Ticho's distinction between treatment goals and life goals would strengthen the authors' concluding chapter.

Barwick and Weegmann writing as a team offer an updated take on group analysis. Their writing is spirited and concise, and they illustrate how clinical writing can help the group therapist in the process of working through. They do a wonderful job of integrating old and new work on group. Their engaging and fresh manner makes their pleasantly brief book a good introduction to group analytic thinking. They also are willing to critique group analysis by raising the concern that its current emphasis on the social unconscious may distract from more pressing clinical issues.

There are, however, several clinically oriented volumes that have come out in the New International Library of Group Analysis (NIGLA), which address this concern. Perhaps, in a second edition, these contributions will be integrated into the text. For example, at one point the authors speak to the technique of combining individual therapy with group therapy. Combined therapy is a practice that they rightly see as more common in the United States than in the United Kingdom. American clinicians make frequent use of combined therapy. Horwitz (2014), for example, worked at Menninger's for years running twice-weekly groups and working as a psychoanalyst. He argued that the treatment of choice for narcissistic personality disorder often was combined therapy. This is a different understanding of the use of combined therapy than expressed by Barwick and Weegmann when they write: "Established contemporary group-analytic wisdom then suggests all group members commit, exclusively, to group therapy" (p. 19). In Billow (2010) in his chapter, "The group never leaves the room: The radical nature of combined therapy" also offers a very different take on the use of combined psychotherapy. An additional clinical contribution from the NIGLA series is from Gans (2010). The authors cite his paper on hostility, but fail to mention his volume of collected papers that explores shame, combined therapy, money, silence, and courage as well as other highly useful clinical topics.

Having taught group to residents and doctoral students for years using Rutan, Stone, and Shay (2014) along with Yalom's (1990/2006) videos and Kennard's Work Book (1993), I wonder where this book will fit. I can see students reading it after they have had an introduction to group and want to deepen their understanding of group psychotherapy by exploring group analysis. This book might be a better place to start than with Schlapobersky's (2016) book, which is more comprehensive and requires a deeper commitment. I also suggest Behr and Hearst's (2005) book for the student who is about to start running their first group. Barwick and Weegmann's book would be a good compliment to Behr and Hearst, as it would be to Rutan and colleagues (2014) or Yalom and Leszcz (2005).

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Dale C. Godby, Ph.D., ABPP, CGP, FAGPA
Group Analytic Practice of Dallas
Dallas, TX 75240
E-mail: dchandes@gmail.com