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The impact of group work education on social work practitioners' work with groups

Steinberg, Dominique Moyse, D.S.W.

City University of New York, 1992

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THE IMPACT OF GROUP WORK EDUCATION ON
SOCIAL WORK PRACTITIONERS' WORK WITH GROUPS

by

DOMINIQUE MOYSE STEINBERG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Social Welfare in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Social Welfare, The City University of New York.

1992

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(T)he fact remains that the reason more real group work is not actually being practiced where it might be practiced, is due in part to a lack of understanding and appreciation of group work. This, together with the facts that few people have been educated and trained to employ it, that meager facilities are available at present for this purpose; that there is as yet no considerable recognition and demand for professionally qualified personnel ... may account in part for the long delay in our recognition in this conference...[1]

* * * * * * * *

Groups are `in´ these days. They are valued by social workers who never took a class in group theory or practice, by lay volunteers and self-help enthusiasts, by teachers, pastors, and by almost everyone it would seem. However, the learning of the how to´s of group work is often through trial and error, by the seat of the pants, or with sink-or-swim-but-do-it mentalities ... One incentive for having group services is that insurance plans will reimburse the provider at the rate of numbers of participants per group session ... The emphasis in these services is upon fixing up individuals, on changing individuals while in a group. It is not on the group itself except as it may be context for individual work.[2]

---

[1] Wilbur Newstetter, National Conference of Social Work, 1935.

[2] Ruth Middleman, Symposium for the Advancement of Social Work With Groups, 1987.

INTRODUCTION

* * * * *

This exploratory study of social work practice constitutes a preliminary investigation into one specific area of social work with groups. Its broad purpose is to explore and describe differences, if any, between the approach to practice with groups of professional social workers who have been educated in social work with groups and those who have not been educated in social work with groups. More specifically, their approaches are compared and contrasted with particular attention to the extent to which they reflect a concept long recognized as central to social work with groups; namely, mutual aid.

The role of mutual aid in social group work is discussed at length later in this dissertation. However, because, as a practice concept, mutual aid represents the driving force of this research project, it deserves brief mention at this point.

Very simply stated, mutual aid refers to the process through which group members help one another - not by gift of advice but by spontaneous and genuine exchanges of ideas, feelings, perspectives, and experiences.

Mutual aid is not a helping process founded on objective or even "inter-subjective" analysis of one another's problems. Rather, it springs forth from members' own life experience; and by sharing experiences with one another, members offer not only empathy and comfort but also provide new ways of looking at old pictures. In fact, the mutual-aid process often involves expression of difference, which, if skillfully used by the worker, often provides rich opportunity for growth and satisfaction. Further, this meaningful exchange among peers is made possible not primarily through the strength of the worker/member relationship but rather through the development and nurturance of the multiple member/member relationships. And it is just that - the skill of harnessing the helping power inherent in those member/member relationships - which represents the group worker's greatest challenge and without which social work practice with groups remains less than its potential.

One of the first rules the social work student learns is that it is informed practice which distinguishes the professional from the good samaritan. Nonetheless, instruction of social work with groups has been virtually eliminated in this country, leaving many practitioners who are called upon to work with groups at a loss for just that informed skill which they are told will separate them from other kindly-minded persons.

In their quest for some control, social workers seek help from any number of sources ranging from instinct to "quick-fix" manuals to extensive texts written by and intended for other professions - some of which depart considerably from the value base of social work.

Although this is not a study of absolutes but of relativity, and although the two sets of respondents who were compared and contrasted for this study do exhibit some similarities, the qualitative data collected reveal some poignant and not insignificant differences between them as well. Moreover, the differences are particularly noteworthy inasmuch as they appear among practitioners who share a small geographical space in which a few schools of social work still offer specific courses in social work with groups and in which the potential for colleagial contagion is very high.

One cannot help but wonder, then, how much greater the differences might be in other areas of the country in which there is less access to social group work education and training.

Chapter One: The Research Problem

Chapter One begins with a discussion of the nature and scope of the research problem. This section is followed by a statement of purpose and a discussion regarding the significance of this study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of major assumptions and limitations.

Chapter Two: Review of the Related Literature

Chapter Two provides a review of the social work literature related to this research problem. Three types of literature are reviewed.

A summary review of the status of work with groups in the field and of social group work education provides a picture of the converse relationship between the professionally-mandated need to know and resources available for knowing.

It is this body of literature which gives drive to this study.

The literature on social work with groups - most especially that related to mutual aid and the group worker's role - provides a framework for understanding the unique components of social work with groups as well as insight into the ethical issues suggested by uninformed practice.

By outlining a number of special skills aimed specifically at eliciting the mutual-aid potential of a group, this body of literature creates the context for study.

There is great concern about "what's happening out there" as a result of the relationship between need for knowledge and dwindling access. Yet, because social work practice generally occurs behind closed doors, little is actually known about what <u>is</u>, <u>in fact</u>, and <u>exactly</u>, happening out there.

By highlighting the paucity of research into this specific area of practice, a review of this last body of literature provides grounds for pursuing this avenue of study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In addition to describing research methodology, Chapter Three provides a thorough review of the interview schedule utilized to gather data. The relationship between each item on the instrument as measurement of some aspect of practice and assessment of approach is explained.

The chapter ends with a description of the methodology employed for content analysis of the acquired data.

Chapter Four: Findings

Chapter Four reports the findings of this study. Because so many of the findings are interconnected, and because a few themes reappear so consistently, some duplication is unavoidable. Further, due to the nature of the data, a logical, sequential presentation of findings from one variable to another or from specific to cumulative is virtually impossible. The reader is encouraged, therefore, to think of the presentation of findings as an antipasto platter rather than as a linear

progression from a specific "beginning" to any specific "end."

Chapter Four begins by offering a profile of this sample, including the presentation of some quantitative as well as qualitative data.

In addition to educational, practice, and training history, respondents' perceptions about how personal membership experiences have affected their attitudes toward work with groups are presented.

The section on sample characteristics is followed by the presentation of respondents' general attitudes toward work with groups - data gleaned from content analysis of responses to interview questions related to professional orientation; perceptions about worker role; and broad beliefs regarding membership.

This chapter continues by presenting in detail the specific findings related to approach to practice. Certain of the questions on the interview schedule were intended to address particular aspects of practice, i.e., to tap into specific areas of practice which were believed to most clearly portray that practitioner's "modus operandi."

Depending on the nature of the practice area addressed by a question, respondents were asked to share either their feelings, attitudes, opinions, or

behaviors; and wherever appropriate and whenever possible, to offer substantiating examples. Content analysis was then used to assess the extent to which each practitioner's approach reflects a mutual-aid model of practice.

The practice issues addressed in this section include control; leadership; goals; norms; the relationship between time and expectations of members and of self; evaluation; and critical incidents, such as "difficult" group members, group conflict, decision-making, and premature termination.

Finally, in an attempt to pull together the few major themes which most appear to differentiate the two comparison groups, this chapter concludes with a recapitulation of the major findings.

Chapter Five: Expert Reflection

Chapter Five presents feedback from a panel of senior social work scholars to whom the major findings of this study were presented for commentary. Their feedback is included to reflect as full an exploration of the subject in question as reasonably possible. Their contribution is gratefully acknowledged, along with a keen recognition of the wealth of ideas and

insights they contributed both toward understanding the implications of this study and toward future investigation.

Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusions

Chapter Six concludes this report. It opens with a brief restatement of purpose and review of research methodology. The major portion of this chapter is then devoted to discussing the findings of this study and their implications for social work practice, social work education, and for the profession at large.

Finally, this chapter concludes with an assessment of methodology and a discussion of possible directions for further study.

"Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution"

> It is not love of my neighbour - whom I often do not know at all which induces me to seize a pail of water and to rush towards his house when I see it on fire... It is a feeling infinitely wider than love or personal sympathy - an instinct that has been slowly developed among animals and men in the course of an extremely long evolution, and which has taught animals and men alike the force they can borrow from the practice of mutual aid and support, and the joys they can find in social life.[1]

[1] Petr Kropotkin, "Introduction," Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution, London: William Heinemann, 1908, p. xiii.

CHAPTER ONE

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

* * * * *

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Professionals would not argue with the claim that it is informed practice which distinguishes the professional from the good samaritan. Yet, it is well known that many social workers routinely offer group-based services to clients without benefit of social group work education. Should their practice, then, be labeled as "uninformed?"

Based upon the proposition that professional education in social work with groups does in fact inform practice by offering theories, concepts, principles, and skills which are at once unique and essential to that method, this study represents an exploration into this professional practice issue.

Work with groups constitutes the greatest growing area of social work practice today (Middleman, 1987; Birnbaum et al., 1989; Wayne and Garland, 1990). Yet, social work with groups is the method in which there continues to be the least amount of professional

education (Birnbaum et al., 1989). As a result, many social workers lead groups "off the cuff" or by operationalizing principles of psychiatric group psychotherapy, a model of working with individuals which represents a distinct departure from social work with groups in its incidental attention to mutual aid (Glassman and Kates, 1986; Middleman, 1987). Leadership of groups in which mutual aid is not perceived by the worker as integral to either process or purpose has been alternately referred to as aggregational therapy of individuals or group casework.

It is not the intent of this study to add to the body of literature which attempts to distinguish social work with groups from psychiatric group psychotherapy. Nor is it the intent of this study to suggest that any helping method is inherently better than any other method practiced with equal integrity. It is the intent of this study, however, to explore the impact that decreasing access to social group work knowledge is having on social workers' approaches to their own practice with groups. And since mutual aid has traditionally been acknowledged as the underpinning of social work with groups, the extent to which practitioners are moving away from that concept as a model for practice into other models is indeed a key issue (Newstetter, 1935; Coyle, 1949; Wilson and Ryland,

1949; Phillips, 1954; Schwartz and Zalba, 1971; Hartford, 1978; Papell and Rothman, 1980; Glassman and Kates, 1986; Middleman, 1987; Northen 1988, Birnbaum et al., 1989). Regardless of the new territory into which practitioners venture for their framework for practice, therefore, that they have departed at all from the social-work group work paradigm is a major loss for the profession.

Unadorned by professional jargon, mutual aid may simply be defined as the process of group members helping one another think things through. Hence, a mutual-aid model of practice denotes an approach to working with groups which has as its centripetal force the development and promotion of the group as a system, a structure in which the interrelationship of its members is a vital component of the group experience. In other words, skill is required beyond that which is essential to one-on-one work. Not only is the concept of mutual aid and its implications for practice irrelevant to casework; it would undoubtedly be regarded as unethical! In the casework process, worker and client do not engage in a working relationship in which each helps the other. The client begins and remains in the position of help-taker. Mutual aid, on the other hand, demands that the client become help-giver as well - a demand based on fundamental beliefs

that people always have strengths to lend others, and that in the lending process is invaluable reward. Consequently, the central task of social work with groups extends beyond the tradition of harnessing clients' strengths in the service of self to harnessing strengths in the service of others; and it is this particular helping act - the process of helping people help one another - which is the unique skill of social group work. "The group members' investment in each other constitutes the new dimension to which professional skill must be addressed. Not only must the worker be able to help people talk but he must help them **talk to each other**" (Schwartz, 1971, p. 12).

Practitioners educated in social work with groups are keenly aware of this multiplicity of helping relationships which exist in every group and use every opportunity to harness that power. Trained group workers can sit in any group and within moments discern the mutual-aid group from any other type of group experience. Observation and professional dialogue reveals, however, that individuals with no education in social work with groups are less aware of the group as a system for mutual aid. Further, even if they are aware that this potential exists in a small group, they are frequently incapable of translating the concept into practice principles; and so

the group is utilized as a context for individual professional attention, even if by default. This difference in conceptualization is not inconsequential. It is the result of the extent to which practice is driven by theory and raises implications about the meaning of the group experience for all of its participants.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to engage in a preliminary investigation of social workers' approaches to practice with groups, most particularly the extent to which their approaches reflect a mutual-aid model of practice. This study does not claim to be a definitive work on approach to practice with groups. Rather, its goal is to explore one particular aspect of practice by seeking to discover major themes, and most especially those related to mutual aid, which appear to distinguish the practice of social workers educated in social work with groups from those not educated in that method.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

The debate between generic and method-specific social work education has been raging for some time. Today, many professional schools offer a generic practice curriculum based on a rationale that specificity renders a disservice to the profession by graduating professionals who 1) tend to identify with a particular method of service rather than with the profession as a whole or 2) may be proficient in one method but less able to differentially diagnose service delivery according to need. In other words, practitioners will tend to impose their proficiencies rather than shape their service to respond appropriately to need. Although there may be some merit to these objections, a generic education may render an even greater disservice. That is, it may prepare that frightening "jack of all trades but master of none."

One response to this retreat from method-specific education has been the lamentation by many scholars and practitioners alike over the loss of group work skill. Too many social workers, they proclaim, are being mandated to work with groups **sans** benefit of group-specific theory, theory which is crucial to ethical and effective practice - and with apparently discouraging results as is evidenced by reports from all sides

including workers themselves (Middleman, 1987, 1989; Birnbaum et al., 1989, Wayne and Garland, 1990). And to reflect this growing concern for what social work professionals are doing "out there," the literature has been replete with arguments for the need for a special and specific theoretical foundation for sound practice with groups along with rebuttals against claims by those not in the know that work with groups requires no special learning or that it requires just a "little bit extra" learning beyond casework or that it's an outdated method not even worth learning (see Hartford, 1978; Rooney et al., 1981; Heap, 1984; Middleman, 1987; Birnbaum et al., 1989; Wayne and Garland, 1990).

In spite of this lamentation that social workers are moving away from values and concepts inherent in social group work to other forms of work with groups which are either uninformed, informed haphazardly, or informed by theories of other professions (and in so being lose some of the essence of social work's mission), however, very little research has in fact been carried out to discover just what it is, in fact, that social workers "out there" are doing.

Therefore, assuming professional interest in quality control and accountability to be constant, and given the increasing use of group-based services along with the

decreasing status of social group work courses in schools of social work today, it is proposed that a study which investigates the association between education and approach to practice will make a significant contribution to the profession of social work.

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

One fundamental assumption of this study is that the issue of quality control is an important one to the social work profession and that therefore, attempts to explore and describe the nature of practice by professionals will be considered a valuable contribution to the profession.

A second fundamental assumption of this study is that there is in fact at the very least an association between education and skill which is qualitatively, if not quantitatively, discernible. And it is this association which this particular study seeks to explore.

In the author's opinion, the most conspicuous limitation of this study is that data collection was based on verbal representation of behaviors. Clearly, the methodology of choice for the study of behavior would include some degree of direct observation. However, as in any field in which confidentiality between provider and

recipient reigns supreme, the goal of observing professionals "in action" over a period of time poses a number of obstacles. To counteract this limitation, respondents were asked for each and every statement they made about their attitudes or approaches to practice situations to offer examples of behaviors to illustrate their points. Content analysis was then used to assess the extent to which self-reports and examples coincided. Therefore, although it is possible that the results of this study have been influenced by what respondents may have heard about what's "right" or by what they think they should be doing rather than what they really do behind closed doors, the fact that self-reports were cross-referenced with examples helped to overcome this potential bias.

Another related limitation regards the fact that all of the respondents share a small geographical work area. In other words, because respondents were selected through a purposive referral process which resulted in the referral of colleagues (and sometimes of friends), it is more than likely that some of the basic concepts and skills of work with groups were gleaned by the non-group-work-educated practitioners through osmosis. In fact, as will be noted in Chapter Four in the description of this sample, informal peer supervision is the predominant form

of post-graduate training. This limitation is tempered, however, by the purpose of this study, which has been to explore the impact of education on practice on a small sample of professional practitioners, not to draw definitive causal conclusions.

"Mutual Aid Among the Animals"

> As soon as we study animals...we at once perceive that though there is an immense amount of warfare...there is...even more, of mutual support, mutual aid... (I)f we...ask Nature: 'Who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?' we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive...the highest development of intelligence and bodily organization. (W)e may safely say that mutual aid is **as much** a law of animal life as mutual struggle, but, as a factor of evolution, it most probably has a **far greater** importance, inasmuch as it favours the development of such habits and characters as insure the maintenance and further development of the species, together with the greatest amount of welfare and enjoyment of life for the individual, with the least waste of energy.
>
> Even such harsh animals as the rats, which continually fight in our cellars, are sufficiently intelligent not to quarrel when they plunder our larders, but to aid one another in their plundering expeditions and migrations, and even to feed their invalids.
>
> 'Don't compete! - competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it!' That is the **tendency** of nature, not always realized in full, but always present...the watchword which comes to us from the bush, the forest, the river, the ocean. 'Therefore combine - practise mutual aid! That is the surest means for giving to each and to all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral.'
>
> (A)s we ascend the scale of evolution, we see association growing more and more conscious...it becomes reasoned. With the higher vertebrates it is occasional, it becomes a voluntary deviation from habitual moods of life. The combination sometimes appears in two or more degrees--the family first, then the group, and finally the association of groups, habitually scattered, but uniting in case of need.[1]

---

[1] Petr Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution, London: William Heinemann, pp. 5-75.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

* * * * *

THE STATUS OF WORK WITH GROUPS TODAY

Clearly, "doing" groups is the "in" thing among social workers of today. Discovered or perhaps rediscovered as a cost-effective method for providing service in an era of severe resource limitations, the use of groups - both in private and organizational practice - is on the rise (see Hartford, 1978; Heap, 1984; Middleman, 1987; Birnbaum et al., 1989; Wayne and Garland, 1990). But at what cost? Unfortunately, many practitioners are leading groups with little if any theoretical grounding in social work with groups. There are far more casework or generalist-trained than group work trained social workers who are leading groups (Middleman, 1987).

There are not only many questions about the effectiveness of haphazardly-directed or uninformed practice but some ethical issues to consider as well. "While groups have power to heal, to nurture, to develop, to educate," states Hartford (1978), "they also have the

power to destroy their members ... And usually groups do not just happen. They take deliberate work on the part of both leadership and membership" (p. 93).

For example, in their review of the literature on work with groups, Galinsky and Schopler (1977) found that most group casualties occur from membership in groups led by individuals who are, among other things, insufficiently trained. Group casualties are defined by Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles as:

> individual(s) who, as a direct result of (their) experience...(become) more psychologically distressed and/or (employ) more maladaptive mechanisms of defense and (whose) negative change (are) not transient but...enduring...as judged eight months after the group experience (1973, pp. 107 and 171).

Such casualties, claim the authors, may be viewed as typically stemming from either personal sources - such as the individual characteristics of group members and group leaders - or from interpersonal sources, i.e., the way in which the relationships and group processes are structured. With regard to personal-source casualties, one particularly disturbing finding was that leaders in whose groups casualties occur are less able to identify them than are the other group participants! With regard to interpersonal-source casualties, the factors most frequently cited as responsible for casualties were the structure of group relationships and group norms, or the group's "standard operating procedures" (p. 90).

Nonetheless, in spite of the constant reminders of the inestimable harm group pressure can inflict on its members and others, so-called "help giving" groups continue all too frequently to be led by practitioners who use professional power to encourage conformity or subjugation rather than individuality or creativity. Under the guise of confrontation, "(d)issenters are chided, laughed at, and yelled at," and the group experience becomes suppressive instead of liberating (Konopka, 1990, p. 14).

A study of the 1988 NASW conference reveals that 13% of the papers presented there dealt with some aspect of working with groups (Birnbaum et al., 1989). At first news, this inspires joy and hope given the consistency with which this professional congregation has rejected a formal forum for the advancement of social work with groups. Evidently, there still exist a few diehards who insist on raising and pondering issues pertinent to the practice of work with groups. A second glance reveals the bad news, however. Almost half of the presenters had never taken a course in social work with groups! In fact, of the entire sample, only 29% had majored in work with groups, while 56% had majored in casework. Moreover, that every single group-work-major presenter had graduated before 1975 adds to the bad news by highlighting the

increasing abandonment in recent years of this professional method in the practice curriculum.

If, as suggested by recent observations, groups are in, and if many of these groups are being conducted by social workers who have not been substantively trained in social work with groups, then one cannot help but wonder from whence comes their foundation for practice. Formal and informal appraisals suggest that practitioners are leading groups either "by the seat of their pants," as the saying goes, or by operationalizing principles of practice rooted in theories of professions other than social work (Rooney et al., 1981). In fact, a recent study of field instructors (Wayne and Garland, 1990) suggests that both methods may be flourishing. In response to being asked to identify and rank-order authors who had significantly influenced their practice with groups, almost one-third of the field instructors polled left the response space blank while the other two-thirds identified Irvin Yalom, a psychiatrist who is the author of texts on the practice of psychiatric group psychotherapy. Major social group work theorists and scholars remained virtually unmentioned. What is simultaneously striking, ironic, and disheartening about this revelation is that the sample under study was comprised of field instructors affiliated with one of the few remaining schools which in fact offers social work

with groups as a major method of study! And what this finding implies about "soit-disant" professional practice in areas in which practitioners have no access at all to education or training in social work with groups dearly troubles the imagination!

Further, if it is true that an ever-increasing number of social workers are practicing in "problem-centered" organizations, as suggested by Middleman and Wood (1990) which in the main utilize non-social-work theory to guide practice, and there are only five schools of social work which offer a major in social work with groups (Birnbaum et al., 1989), then it is safe to assume that there exists a large and growing number of social workers who are indeed practicing either haphazardly or turning to "quick fix" manuals and to texts outside the profession (which may or may not reflect the value base of social work) in their attempt to adopt some framework for leadership.

Recent reviews of the literature (Feldman, 1986; Middleman and Wood, 1990) confirm a shifting away from attention to social group work theory and practice even among those who are purportedly keen on maintaining a social group work consciousness! Most likely as reflection and cause both of the increasing neglect of group work in the educational curriculum and of the

practice "out there," an increasing proportion of the literature on work with groups is being directed to work with special-problem populations. Although there has been growth in the volume of literature on work with groups since the 1950's, admits Feldman, there have nonetheless been significantly fewer articles which attempt to differentiate social group work from either casework or psychiatric group therapy. Rather, the literature has concentrated on practice issues involved in work with special populations, contend Middleman and Wood, reflecting "the impact of the economy on health and welfare services in both the public and private sectors. This (i.e., special needs populations) is where funds are now directed." Hence, the emphasis of social service has also shifted to "adults with problems, especially those problems that bring them to mental health centers, hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and geriatric settings. The `market' for group work," in other words, "appears to have shifted over the years from an emphasis on normal children and activities to adults with problems and talk" (p. 16).

Undoubtedly, as suggest Middleman and Wood, the shift in welfare priorities has created this apparently parallel shift in social work practice, which is in turn reflected in the literature. As a result, however,

social workers mandated to work with groups but feeling unprepared by their own professional education to do so justifiably seek guidance from wherever it is most readily accessible. Unfortunately, since social work is increasingly taking place in problem-centered host agencies, as noted above, the most readily-available paradigms have been problem-centered ones. The inherent worth or utility of various practice paradigms are not the key issues here. The key issues are that (1) the strength-centered social work paradigm for practice is lost, regardless of what other formal framework replaces it, and that (2) the burden for that loss cannot even be assigned to representatives of other helping professions who shun the social work paradigm but to the very profession which lays claim to its ownership! The result of such a shift is that leadership is often haphazard, based on "trial-and-error," and moreover, energy expended is usually directed to changing the individual while that individual is in a group, not on conceptualizing the group system itself as a client nor in using the group itself as a medium of help-giving. In other words, by remaining at the level of aggregational attention to individuals in a group setting, that practice remains essentially uninformed by social group work values, philosophy, and major practice principles.

As far back as 1935, Wilbur Newstetter maintained that "all work with groups is not group work" and that "more real group work" (1935, pp. 296-297) was not being practiced because of a lack in specific education and training. So, this concern for application of informed skill is not a new one but covers a span of decades while those in the know have observed the disastrous consequences of groups being "done" by those not in the know...

SOCIAL WORK WITH GROUPS - THE EDUCATIONAL PICTURE

> Group work is not 'casework in a group.' The methodology of group work ... has unique principles, techniques, and skills, and these must be learned.[2]
>
> Social group work is...one part of a methodological whole and also a separate and distinct way of helping individuals in groups to 'attain satisfying relationships.' It makes a contribution to the whole of social work; yet it stands alone as well. It cannot be said that group work or case work or community organization work is any more important or any less important. All three are needed; all three are related.[3]

In spite of this and many similar claims about the specificity of skill involved in social work with groups - skills which clearly demand a professional stretch beyond casework practice - courses on group work have been on the wane in the last few decades. To compensate for this loss in formal instruction, Middleman (1978) suggests that workers frequently use the following inadequate approaches to learn to work with groups:

(1) becoming involved in a group as a member and hoping membership will teach leadership.

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[2] Frey in Tropp, Emanuel, "Whatever Happened to Group Work," in Social Work with Groups, Spring, 1978, p. 87.

[3] Harleigh Trecker, Social Group Work: Principles and Practice, New York: Whiteside Inc., 1955, p. 11.

Unfortunately, the analogy between membership and leadership experiences is unsound and not truly helpful.

(2) doing a field practicum under varying degrees of supervision.

The key phrase here is "varying degrees" of supervision. The extent of the supervisor's theoretical knowledge and skill is obviously of great import.

(3) picking up information here and there and applying bits of practice wisdom in a haphazard manner.

It seems unnecessary to elaborate on the potential dangers of this particular approach to learning!

(4) co-leading with a more experienced person.

This style of learning has a number of problems, like the skill level of the "expert;" a normal susceptibility of any novice to either adopt or reject a role model's style without a well thought out rationale; potential clashes in personality or philosophy; inherent inequality of the two leaders; and lack of planning before and "debriefing" after, each session, along with many more.

(5) attending skills labs. These might be classes which actually teach group-specific skills within the safety of the classroom and which provide practice opportunities and feedback regarding leadership (pp. 20-21).

This last approach would appear as a legitimate learning process until one thinks about the differences between practicing in the safe classroom and acting in the real and unpredictable world.

According to Middleman, the only viable means of acquiring new knowledge and learning to apply group-specific skill is through the combination of classroom learning (which provides theory and safe opportunity to practice) and the opportunity to apply techniques one has learned in the less safe but more real environment (through fieldwork) (p. 21).

Although by the middle of this century instruction in social work with groups had found its way into and appeared to be entrenched in curriculum policy, by the end of the 1970's, any methods emphasis was written out of the accreditation criteria and standards of the Council on Social Work Education "in favor of developing generalist, generic, or integrative practice approaches" (Birnbaum et al., 1989, p. 5). And in what appears to have been continuously frenetic attempts to consolidate a myriad social work activities under one socially and professionally acceptable umbrella, educational curriculum policy has in recent years focused on articulating and stressing those principles of practice which it regards as unifying rather than divisive (Middleman and Wood, 1990). Whatever professional advantages may have come of this process, one unfortunate consequence has been the loss of instruction of group work in favor of the generic or generalist, a loss compounded

by the fact that most of this new instruction is carried out by instructors with no background in social work with groups (Birnbaum et al., 1989). With very few exceptions and in spite of "efforts to formulate generalist practice," by the 1980's, "dominant practice models focus(ed) on individuals and families...a case model prevail(ed), and knowledge of group work (was) missing" (p. 55).

Today, CSWE has achieved a virtual complete abandonment of specific group work instruction in its programs. This is not to suggest that there is _no_ attention to work with groups in curriculum policy or even in reality. There are, in fact, classes in group psychotherapy in many MSW programs, to which the popularity of _The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy_ as primary teaching reference in many of those schools would attest. Group therapy, however, is only one type of group experience and does not necessarily, in fact does not most probably, attend to the values, theories, concepts, and practice principles which comprise the body of social work with groups (Glassman and Kates, 1986).

Apparently, social work with groups as a professional method has been reconceptualized as a "field" broad enough to include any number of approaches to practice regardless

of the extent to which they incorporate the values inherent in social group work, such as mutual aid.

Since, as previously noted, most generic/generalist courses are taught by faculty with casework backgrounds, and since there is indisputably much truth to the axiom that people teach what they know the implications are self-evident. In the main, formal instruction of social work with groups as a professional method of practice has been rejected by schools of social work. Even when work with groups is included as an "area" of social work practice and not presented as group psychotherapy, it is usually given only cursory attention because the generic approach necessarily limits the amount of in-depth preparation a student can receive in any given practice area.

A generic or generalist approach to the instruction of social work practice is not inherently limiting to the learning experience, of course. In fact, there is much that is generic to the practice of social work. In the classroom, however, reality impinges, and as a result, what is unique is often neglected in favor of what is common (Levine, 1990). In terms of implications for the instruction and practice of social work with groups, it is clear that instruction of this method has virtually ended - at least for the current generation of practitioners.

Consequently, when confronted with the formidable task of developing and working with groups, many current-day practitioners do not possess those professional social work skills considered essential for practice with groups.

Hence, even though their casework and other types of practice may be firmly grounded within the social work paradigm, their work with groups is not, even though Rooney et al. (1981) confirm that the desire by social workers for training (particularly through extensive supervised leadership) in the method of work with groups is high.

WORKING WITH GROUPS FROM A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

Why is the task of developing and working with groups from a social work perspective referred to as a "formidable" task? Why is specific study so essential to social work with groups? What, exactly, is this "social work paradigm" with regard to work with groups?

The answer to these questions is at once simple and complex. Simply stated, it is the turning of a group into a Group (as coined by Margaret Hartford) which represents the formidable task. A Group has the potential to be greater than the sum of its parts, just like, with

the addition of soul, a man may become greater than the sum of his "parts." What turns a man into a mensch or a group into a Group is spirit. Like the orchestra leader who imbues spirit into musicians who can already read the notes and play their instruments and could undoubtedly play their piece of music but who would not have that wholeness, it is the worker who imparts that spirit by lending a vision of the possible and desirable. The problem for practice is that even if this concept is understood in the abstract, without skill, its implications for practice remain vague:

> It is one thing to use the group for orientation and information giving -- for conveying the agency's or worker's message to others. It is quite another matter to involve the participants in such a way that they have a hand in creating their group experience, in growing through the way their group is managed. This kind of group work is not merely a set of techniques added on top of a basic individualistic orientation. Group work is not just another specialty that can be appended to practice via reading a book. It is a mindset, a mentality, a way of seeing the world which takes study and immersion to master. Involved here is learning to share one's power with group members, to give up control, to gain comfort with a practice where others see all that one does, to deal with group conflict and decision-making, to value the mutual aid potential of the group process, and to come to terms with the fact that others may be more helpful to the members than you are (Birnbaum et al., 1989, pp. 19-20).

Hence, this review of the literature will attempt to explicate what it means, in theory and in fact, to turn a group into a Group - i.e., to find, harness, and use a group's potential for mutual aid - by describing and

discussing how the mutual-aid process symbolizes the social work paradigm for work with groups.

What does it mean to practice social work with groups? There is no ready response to this question, no clear definition of social work with groups which satisfies all inquirers. In fact, arriving at a definition of social work with groups has long been a dilemma, as evidenced by Emanuel Tropp's statement about the profession's persistence in attempting to conceptualize a mainstream model for social group work:

> Each succeeding generation (of theoreticians) has built on the work of those who came before, resulting in both greater depth and scope while resting on a solid base. Even more important, this mainstream has stayed **within** the framework of social work practice as a whole, including its values, purposes, and knowledge. Therefore, the mainstream thrust in group work is, in fact, **the** representative of social work in the area of work with groups (1978, p. 93).

In light of this concerted effort over a number of years, the intimidating endeavor of attempting to define social work with groups will continue to be relegated to the scholars, theoreticians, and practitioners who abound in attempts to do so.

Instead, the task of offering yet another technical definition will be avoided in favor of offering "description by amalgam" based on the literature which pertains; for if there is disagreement in many areas of what constitutes social work with groups, there is still

notable agreement that (1) social work with groups has a specific value base, (2) this value base gives social work with groups those qualities which help to distinguish it from other work with groups, and (3) the most vital of those qualities is mutual aid.

The mainstream model of social work with groups, according to Papell and Rothman (1980) is characterized by three general principles: common goals, mutual aid, and non-synthetic experiences. Practice principles are geared expressly to attending to individuals' needs to belong, to helping individuals establish bonds, and to helping group members develop empathy for one another. Differences are not perceived as threats to the mutual-aid system. To the contrary, they are encouraged as sources of strength and resource. The mainstream social work group "provides a testing ground by which the members can experience the realities and consequences of individual differences and can acquire skills in perceiving and withstanding negative group influences" (p. 9).

Consequently, the worker's major role is to foster the group's capacity to assume responsibility for its affairs - including the management of difference - such that the three primary needs articulated above may be met. Professional skills are massed together under

rubrics of heightening members' capacities to identify with one another, diminishing their defensiveness, increasing trust and intimacy, helping members deal with feelings as legitimate elements of the interaction process, and role modeling. "In summary the essential demand made upon the worker...is to further linkages between members as they engage in active participation in group building while striving to meet their own needs" (p. 12).

How is social work with groups different from other types of group approaches? According to Breton (1990)

> the way we structure groups is all-important, for a group can be structured so that the whole person in each member is invited to participate, or it can be structured so that only the troubled, broken, or hurt part of the person is invited to participate. In the first instance, the possibility of experiencing fulfillment and 'deep delight' exists; in the second it does not (p. 27).

Middleman (1987) articulates the difference through the function of the worker. The process of social work with groups is distinguishable from other approaches to work with groups in four distinct ways:

> (1) by (its attention to) helping participants gain a sense of one another and their groupness by focusing on member-to-member communication toward recognizing capacity for and building a system of mutual aid;
>
> (2) by (its) understanding the value of group process as the central change dynamic;

(3) by (its belief in) working (oneself) out of a job from the beginning by helping members become more autonomous - helping them take charge of "their" group; and

(4) by (its attention to) helping members re-experience their groupness at the point of termination - or always attending to endings, e.g., with a particular individual or individuals in open-ended groups (p. 3).

Newstetter (1935) defines social work with groups in the following way:

> Group work may be defined as an educational process emphasizing (1) the development and social adjustment of an individual through voluntary group association; and (2) the use of this association as a means of furthering other socially desirable ends. It is concerned therefore with both individual growth and social results. Moreover, it is the combined and consistent pursuit of both these objectives, not merely one of them, that distinguishes group work as a process" (p. 291).

Building on Newstetter's conceptualization fifty years later, Glassman and Kates (1986) refer to the social work group process as "democratic humanistic" with dual and inseparable objectives of psychosocial purpose and mutual aid. And like Newstetter, they claim that it is the duality of these objectives which are _always present together_ which distinguishes the social work group from all other approaches. The appellation "democratic humanistic" is intended to reflect the social work group's value base. "Democracy refers to the egalitarian distribution of power, and humanism is built on a value base that views people as responsible for one another"

(p. 150). More specifically, Glassman and Kates regard the role and status of norms in the group experience as the most distinct differentiating factor. Not only are norms (i.e., the "normal" way in which the group goes about being and doing) a central aspect of the social work group, the establishment of norms is a legitimate, even vital, group pursuit unto itself because of their ability to impede or compel mutual aid:

> Norms develop in varied forms of group practice. While they emerge in psychoanalytic group therapy, they are not central to that form. Creating a social form is not its objective; rather the presentation of social forms is addressed interpretively as a psychologically symbolic statement. In ego psychology and cognitive therapy groups (Yalom, 1975), the therapist examines certain norms to highlight neurotic interactional modes and supports those group norms that enable personality change. In the T-group, norms are set and supported by the trainer (Brandford, Gibb, and Benne, 1964). They are examined according to how they contribute to the group's development as a self-reflecting social unit, albeit without psychosocial purpose beyond the experience. Only the social work group has as its objective the explicit development of a democratic humanistic group form to serve as the underpinning for actualizing psychosocial purpose (p. 151).

In other words, ways of being and doing are addressed in other approaches only inasmuch as they offer material for intrapsychic study. Group norms are only means to ends, not ends in of themselves. Moreover, they are only addressed to the extent that they impel or impede individual personality change.

In further discussion of difference, and in response to the loss of instruction in group work and the resulting shift of practitioners to problem-centered work with groups, Glassman and Kates articulate their fear that the value base which gives social group work its "social work" stamp is being eroded. The value base to which they refer (Konopka, 1983) is comprised of the following three primary values:

(1) responsibility among human beings in recognition of interdependence and brotherhood,

(2) mental health as a symbol of strength to assume that responsibility, and

(3) the dignity of each individual (pp. 61-62).

"Social group workers like Coyle...Trecker...Klein... and Konopka...," argue Glassman and Kates, "have long reflected a commitment to the actualization of a democratic humanistic group. Social group work is a distinct form of group practice precisely because its practice theory emanates from values similar to those identified by Konopka" (p. 151).

"Our concern about the erosion of this value base among contemporary practitioners," they continue, "has given further impetus" to an articulation of what makes social work with groups unique among group approaches. Unfortunately, they conclude, "(w)ith the increase of skill by social workers in clinical practice may have come

the unnecessary sacrifice of the democratic humanistic group form" (pp. 149-150).

If practitioners do not integrate this value base which is the foundation of social work with groups, or, if they do but they are unable to realize it through their professional participation in groups (i.e., through what they do and say) then "(l)ack of understanding of democratic values **in action** (emphasis added)...gives rise to elitism by practitioners. Unwittingly using knowledge devoid of (these) values, practitioners may effect an aloof image that does not enable the group to hold them accountable for their attempts to influence the members" (p. 150) - which brings the discussion full circle to the issue of power. As that of the leadership increases, so does that of the membership decrease.

Perhaps, when all else is said and done, it is the issue of power which most clearly distinguishes social work with groups from all other approaches. While the power differential which inheres in all groups which have leadership is apparently tolerated - even utilized (if not exploited) - toward goal attainment in other approaches, in the social work group, the power differential is equalized in the service of mutual aid. If social group work values are to be realized, power must be equalized; and it is only through responsibility and accountability

of _all_ participants that this equalization occurs. Only through equalization can there exist room for mutual aid:

> When dealing with the problems of a group, the leader must involve the group as a whole in solutions. Although certain individuals may need protection or support, the leader's primary focus should be on helping the entire group understand and resolve the problem situation ... Whenever possible, members should be enlisted in efforts to reshape group conditions (Galinsky and Schopler, 1977, p. 93).

THE ROLE OF MUTUAL AID IN SOCIAL WORK WITH GROUPS

To what, specifically, does mutual aid refer? Mutual aid is both cause and effect of social work with groups. As cause, it refers to the fundamental assumption upon which that method rests, i.e., that members can give as well as take help. As effect, it refers to the actualization of that assumption, reflected in the group's capacity to value and exploit the multiple helping relationships which exist among its membership.

As a central concept of social work with groups, the term "mutual aid" was first coined by William Schwartz, who borrowed it from Petr Kropotkin, a Russian writer on the role of mutual aid in the evolution and progression of species (1908). Kropotkin himself had first heard the term in a lecture by the dean of St. Petersburg

University, an eminent zoologist named Kessler, whose lecture at a Russian Congress of Naturalists in January 1880 had greatly impressed Kropotkin. Kessler's idea was that:

> Beside the `law of Mutual Struggle' there is in Nature the `law of Mutual Aid,' which, for the success of the struggle for life, and especially for the progressive evolution of the species, is far more important than the law of mutual contest... I obviously do not deny the struggle for existence, but I maintain that the progressive development of the animal kingdom, and especially of mankind, is favoured much more by mutual support than by mutual struggle" (Kropotkin, p. x).

Mutual aid is not integral to all forms of work with groups, although it has long been at the center of social work with groups. Its process has been labeled in various ways, but as a concept, its centrality has held fast. Along with actualization of psychosocial purpose, mutual aid is and has always been a primary objective of social work with groups; and it is in its inseparable pairing with psychosocial purpose that social work with groups can be distinguished from all other group methods.

In fact, actualization of the mutual-aid system must precede attention to purpose in social work with groups; and in turn, it is the mutual-aid process which becomes the milieu through which work on psychosocial purpose takes place. Mutual aid and psychosocial purpose are <u>not</u> present together in this manner in any other group

methods, including group psychotherapy (Glassman and Kates, 1986).

Middleman and Wood (1990) refer to the role of mutual aid in this way:

> First of all, to qualify as social work with groups, worker attention must focus on helping members to become a system of mutual aid. This comes about through encouraging between-member communication. A second criterion for inclusion in social work with groups is that the worker must actively understand, value, and respect the group process itself as the powerful change dynamic it is... Implicit in such a stance is the valuation of the members as helpers - many not just one central helping person. The worker's basic attitudinal set is the third criterion for social work with groups. From the very first group meeting, the social worker thinks about working herself out of a job. That is to say, she enables the group to increase its autonomy to its greatest potential. Although therapy can be the content...contingent upon the way in which the group as a whole and groupness are used...some clinical work will fall outside the realm of social work, especially if the focus of the practitioner is limited to the treatment of individuals - casework in a group (p. 11).

The encouragement of group autonomy "to its greatest potential" represents the crux of the issue in terms of practice of course, because defining limits is usually considered to be the professional's role. In social group work, it is as much the member's role as the worker's, however, perhaps even more so. And with regard to problem-centered practice, this issue of who decides is compounded due to the inherent focus on those elements of the person which impede that movement toward autonomy, on those factors which limit its potential. As a result, the

emphasis is on impediment rather than potential; and it is the impediment which gets the attention of worker and member alike. The group experience then revolves around what is "wrong" rather than what "could be." Or, stated another way, what "could be" is only inferred from what is "wrong," and by being inferential rather than explicit and exploited, it takes a back seat in attention. Unfortunately, it is the "could be's" which lend vision and power to satisfaction and actualization.

When Northen (1969) refers to collaboration "in decision-making processes which enable the client" (p. 7) - a collaboration which only comes about when the worker helps group members focus on clarification of patterns of behavior - she is referring to mutual aid:

> This (collaboration) of course can be done in the individual context as well, except that the opportunity to see the patterns in action, so to speak, rest only with the ability to see the action in relationship to the worker, not in relationship to others, as is possible in the group" (p. 210).

The group is a safe environment for the rehearsal of new attitudes and behaviors. Members can be effective in modifying one another's false perceptions and in proposing alternative methods of behaving or coping. "Through such means," concludes Northen, "persons can learn that new efforts are worthwhile" (p. 218).

Wilson and Ryland (1949) also discuss mutual aid in terms of decision-making. Decision-making, they claim, is

the "central core of the social group work method:"

> (I)t is essential that the structure be such that the members have the privileges and responsibilities of the management of their own (corporate) affairs. A collection of individuals will **not** develop the characteristics of a social group unless they have the right and the ability to make decisions significant to their own group life (p. 66).

In terms of practice, members must be taught and encouraged to engage in ways which continuously promote the use of the group as their own mutual-aid system (i.e., to turn the group into a Group); and successful social group work practice depends on the worker's ability to help the members do this. Otherwise stated, it is **within the interaction process** - that mutual-aid process - that objectives are met - i.e., that members learn new ideas or skills, expand, improve, or discard old ones, develop new attitudes, or receive support for existing ones.

Shulman (1984) refers to mutual aid in the context of the two-client concept. The member as individual is perceived as one client, while the Group as a system is perceived as another. Such a duality is undoubtedly alien to the practitioner whose conceptualization of practice and skill derives solely from casework or generic practice principles! It is out of this very duality, however, that tasks evolve which are at once specific and central to social group work and neither of which reasonably apply to

casework. The first of these group-specific tasks is group formation, the second is the facilitation of relationships among group members - and both of these are integrally tied to mutual aid.

Phillips (1954) acknowledges the role of mutual aid in the articulation of two propositions upon which group work skill rest. They are that (1) "dynamic possibilities for helping through the group work process" exist, and (2) "all people have strengths" (pp. 5-7). These propositions not only acknowledge the existence of mutual aid in the social work group but recognize it as the central element of social group work practice. However, the worker must believe in its potential, claims Phillips, for the possibility of its realization to exist. If not, the worker will end up frustrated for what cannot be done rather than appreciate what could be done.

Lang (1987) uses mutual aid to differentiate a group from a collectivity, and a major factor in distinguishing a group from an aggregate or collective is the quality of its interaction. The Group comes into being, is born, so to speak, only when mutual aid occurs.

How can one recognize a group? By looking for mutual aid "in action." In discussing those variables which can cause an aggregate of individuals to remain at

the collective level rather than move toward the group level, Lang states:

> Collectivity may be the outcome of such things as ... an interactive procedure that limits the flow of interaction to certain particular patterns (e.g., dyadic pattern between worker and member) or in which some of the interactive possibilities are not activated (and) failure to develop the autonomy of the entity, so that it does not become self-directed (p. 18).

Middleman (1978) suggests that the extent to which mutual aid is encouraged may be discerned by looking at patterns of communication in groups. There exists the potential for four different patterns of communication. If one can visualize the way group participants would interact within those patterns, then the consequences of different interventions can be understood.

One possible pattern of group communication is labeled as the "maypole" process. In this pattern, the worker talks to group members individually, one by one. The maypole pattern represents the classic didactic approach and thereby epitomizes the antithesis of a mutual-aid process.

The second possible pattern of group communication is referred to as the "round-robin" approach. In this pattern, each member takes a turn talking in relation to any given subject. Like the maypole pattern, the round-robin pattern also precludes spontaneity of interaction which is crucial to the mutual-aid process.

Middleman refers to the third possible pattern of group communication as the "hot seat" pattern, and it is this method Middleman has in mind when she refers to the "casework in the group" syndrome. In this pattern, the worker engages in dialogue with a particular member while others watch and presumably learn how to extrapolate and transfer principles to their own situations. Again, the process is basically didactic with little if any room for spontaneous member-to-member interaction.

Finally, the fourth possible group communication pattern is "free-floating." In this pattern, group members take responsibility for speaking to one another in accordance with the subject at hand and who else is contributing verbally or is remaining silent.

Although depending on purpose, structure, and membership, there may be room in work with groups for the utilization of any number and combination of these four patterns of communication, it is in its yielding of much of the responsibility for the flow of discussion to the group members that the free-floating pattern best sets the stage for mutual aid (pp. 20-21).

Finally, very much in keeping with Kropotkin's conceptualization of the role of mutual aid in social development, Breton (1990) urges the return of the social work profession to its traditional course of advocacy on

behalf of the socially disenfranchised. "I think it is fair to say," argues Breton,

> that mutual aid is seen nowadays largely as an intra-group phenomenon; what is recognized is the power members have to influence and to help one another. I agree that the recognition of this power constitutes the sine qua non of effective use of groups. I fear, however, that reducing mutual aid to an intra-group phenomenon has led us to concentrate on the healing power of mutual aid and to forget its liberating power. Liberating power is linked to extra-group and to inter-group solidarity, which leads to strength, action, and change at the social, economic, and political levels. Intra-group solidarity...leads mainly to strength, action, and change at the personal level...but it is simply insufficient if our work is to have any relevance whatsoever to the poor, the racially, ethnically or sexually oppressed, to exploited children, youth and old people, and to all the others who are relegated to the margins of society and await opportunities for empowerment (p. 29).

In full agreement that is social work's task to actualize mutual aid at all possible social levels notwithstanding, this discussion must nevertheless return to the intragroup realm; and a discussion of implications for practice by Schwartz (1971) provides a good transition back to this small but nonetheless important realm by examining worker role. According to Schwartz,

> group members' investment in each other constitutes the new dimension to which professional skill must be addressed. Not only must the worker be able to help people talk to each other; the talk must be purposeful, related to the contract that holds them together; it must have feeling in it, for without affect there is no investment; and it must be about real things, not a charade, or a false consensus, or a game designed to produce the illusion of work without risking anything in the process" (p. 12).

MUTUAL AID AND THE GROUP WORKER'S ROLE

> The clown's cleverness may be shown in his tripping and tumbling. He trips and tumbles just as clumsy people, except that he does so <u>on purpose</u>, after much rehearsal and at the golden moment, and where the children can see him...[4]

"There can be little disagreement," claims Trecker (1955) "with the statement that the key to effective group work lies with the worker...The way in which the worker works is a distinguishing characteristic of social group work (p. 23). Trecker continues to discuss the role of the social worker in the group, addressing to the conscious use of the term "worker" to refer to the role of the professional rather than the more commonly-used term of "leader:"

> The deliberate choice of the word `worker' represents more than mere personal preference... Every group has `leaders,' that is, group members whose leadership arises and functions within the group. Social group work requires, in addition, a worker who is there to work with the group in a helping role (and the) way in which the worker gives help to the group is all-important. The quality of his work is influenced by what he brings to the group situation in the way of experience, knowledge, understanding, and skill (pp. 23-27).

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4 Middleman, Ruth, "Seeing" the Group in Group Work: Skills for Dealing with the Groupness of Groups," Symposium for the Committee for the Advancement of Social Work With Groups, 1987, p. 9.

Newstetter (1935) conceptualizes that skill as conscious effort and refers to it as technique, which is directed toward the group:

> (M)any people today are still trying to develop a group-work procedure in terms of prearranged sequences and standardized procedures, or in terms of techniques selected at random. More and more we are coming to recognize that this is not good group work (pp. 292-293).

As a result of consciously-selected technique, claims Newstetter, the group process becomes slightly modified. This modified process then determines to a large extent what the worker's next conscious effort is to be - which technique in turn slightly modifies the group process once again. And so continues the cycle of modification of process and intervention. This concept does not, of course, exclude or disavow members' contributions to this process, for it is their actions and reactions to the worker and one another which comprise that "modified process." For the process to be spontaneous rather than prearranged, however, claims Newstetter, it requires "a scheme for...interpretation" (p. 292). In other words, some paradigm for action and reaction and for interpreting action, reaction, and interaction is necessary. And because the skill of engaging in this process is rooted in social work values, it is directed toward what Newstetter refers to as the sine qua non of group work, i.e., self direction, spontaneity, and determination:

> Generally speaking, stress is placed on the guidance, not the manipulation, of the adjustive efforts being made by members of the group and the group as a whole, rather than on the authoritative direction of these adjustive efforts... The group worker's role is largely that of understanding the needs of individual members, of helping to set the stage, of helping to provide the suitable environment for learning, expression, adjustment, and social action (p. 294).

Coyle (1949) defines the role of the group worker somewhat less elaborately but no less clearly. The function of the group worker, according to Coyle, is to enable "various types of groups to function in such a way that both group interaction and program activities contribute to the growth of the individual" (p. 11). More specifically, states Coyle (1959):

> It seems to me that the primary skill is the ability to establish a relationship with a group as a group... This involves the capacity to feel at ease and, in fact, to enjoy the social interplay among members and to be able to perceive both individual behavior and its collective manifestations...as well as to become a part of the relationships and to be affect them (p. 100).

Not only is the role of mutual aid acknowledged in her definition, but that it is the worker's function to enable group members to act and interact in such a way that those dynamics contribute to their well-being is also evident. Coyle continues:

> This establishment of a relationship with the group rests in part on an intellectual understanding of the dynamics of individual behavior and a rational system of ideas for the diagnosis of group behavior within its social setting (p. 101).

"He will not, of course, hold the center of the stage nor dominate the group's planning," concludes Coyle (1937, p. 3.)

By suggesting that it is the worker's knowledge of individual and interpersonal behavior as it relates to and may occur in each phase of group development, Northen (1988) further elucidates the need for knowledge and skill:

> Through mutual aid, the dynamic forces emerge and facilitate the positive use of the group by its members...These forces do not operate automatically; far from it; the worker's major task is to facilitate their development and use in relation to the group's goals...The worker needs, therefore, to make sure that the group becomes a mutual aid and mutual need-meeting system (pp. 46-47).

Kaiser (1958) proposes that the distinction between the processes of working with groups and social work with groups be based on methodology rather than on the characteristics of the (any) group. In other words, it is specificity of skill which must differentiate social work with groups from other group approaches.

An intellectual understanding of the value base of social work with groups does not ensure such skill, of course. Even a genuine desire to create a mutual-aid system may be thwarted by lack of training, which may inadvertently cause workers to bring about the opposite of what they intend (Glassman and Kates, 1986). However passionate the espousal of democratic and humanistic

values, it is only skill which permits the translation of ideology into action. Without skill, particularly during the earliest stages of group development when norms become established:

> workers, because of their own anxiety and paradoxically out of their own desire to `enforce' an egalitarian concept of membership tend to become overly directive/authoritarian, inadvertently squelching conflict. What the worker needs to do at this point is to `enable exploration of feelings and interactions' by allowing different voices to emerge so that the group can engage in real and meaningful problem-solving and in turn assume shared ownership (p.153).

Why such emphasis on shared ownership of the group? Emphasis on ownership is integral in social work with groups because it is only through shared ownership, brought about by spontaneous and meaningful interaction, that group members can assert their basic rights to interdependence, mental health, and dignity.

Phillips (1954) agrees with the observation that knowledge is not enough. Although she admits to being most fearful of the worker who has skill without dedication, she also fears the converse - "dedication exclusive of skill" - and notes that the latter process "results in questionable service" (p. 4). "(K)nowledge about group work principles is not enough to create skillful group work," adds Phillips (p. 10), using Virginia Robinson's analogy between group worker and master craftsman to emphasize her point:

> The skillful way of working develops out of some relationship between the workman and the material in which he works... His understanding of his material and his capacity to work **with** it, instead of **against** it, to utilize and not do violence to its essential nature, determine his ability to develop skill in his handling of the process. Skill might be defined, then, as the capacity to set in motion and control a process of change that takes place in such a way that the change that takes place in the material is effected with the greatest degree of consideration for and utilization of the quality and capacity of the material (p. 10).

Further, claims Hamilton (1949), help is most effective "if the recipient participates actively and responsibly in the process," (p. 8) confirming the need for skill which enables the recipient to participate in just that way which will render the help he receives most effective.

Hartford (1964) perceives this skill as the direction of effort toward building member-to-member relationships. The Group is the means for service, not the worker/member relationship, contends Hartford. Ergo, the worker must know how to help a _group_ (i.e., a collective of individuals) turn into a _Group_ (an entity with a life of its own and capacity for mutual aid). To that end, a worker's primary interventions "take the form of...facilitation of interpersonal relationships among members and promotion of group action" (p. 8).

Schwartz (1976) articulates the evolution of mutual aid and the worker's role in this way:

> As the intimacy theme appears alongside the theme of authority around which the casework process is built, the worker finds himself in a situation where there is not just one helping relationship but a multiplicity of them; and this calls for some new knowledge and some new skills. The worker is now put to the additional task of helping people not only to help themselves but to help each other as well (p. 194).

And because a group can exert tremendous influence on its members - both positive and negative - the group worker must be not only guided by theory but know how to apply it while adhering to practice principles developed within a social work value framework. And further, as is consistently reiterated, the ability to apply theory is not a haphazard process. It derives from an ability to conceptualize, in foresight and in depth, the consequences of interventions - a process which may also be referred to as skill (Hartford, 1978).

Extending Schwartz' conceptualization of the mutual-aid system, Shulman articulates and explicates the dynamics of mutual aid. According to Shulman (1984), the dynamics of mutual aid to which the worker must skillfully attend are:

(1) sharing data

(2) engaging in dialectic

(3) discussing taboos

(4) experiencing the "all in the same boat" phenomenon

(5) mutual support

(6) mutual demand

(7) individual problem-solving

(8) rehearsal

(9) experiencing the "strength in numbers" phenomenon (pp. 164-170).

And according to Shulman, it is the existence of potential obstacles to mutual aid which help to define the role of the worker. The three major areas of potential obstacles articulated by Shulman are the difficulty with which members have identifying their self-interest with that of other members, the complexity of the tasks involved in creating a mutual-aid system, and the difficulty with which people communicate honestly (p. 170).

Wilson and Ryland (1949) portray the group worker as "the bearer of values for the agency and for society" who "helps the members to clarify the issues and to use channels...for the discussion of differences" (p. 95). Not only is the expression of difference unavoidable in a group, it is essential for genuine interaction.

The worker is in a strategic position, therefore, to both affect and effect social processes within the group, according to Wilson and Ryland. Without professional skill, however, personal attitudes take precedence over professional awareness, as discusses Bernstein:

> Attitudes toward conflict can be of varying kinds, which have diverse implications for the nature of (the worker's) intervention. He may, at one pole, regard conflict as unpleasant and undesirable, and as an indication of immaturity, perhaps even as a reflection of his own inadequacy... The worker having this attitude toward conflict may behave in a variety of ways. His concern could be to head off, prevent, and even to suppress conflict in groups... Another worker stance could be that conflict is somehow an unfortunate concomitant of...the group's existence, but that this unpleasantness is a temporary evil and real business and living will come just as soon as we can get over this messiness... At the other pole is the position which venerates conflict as almost an ideal state. A third...stance in relation to conflict is that it has its terrors but that it frequently offers magnificent opportunities for growth... There is nothing automatically beneficial about conflict (but) if it is handled thoughtfully and skillfully, it can result in highly constructive change. Perhaps the most important goal is not so much the outcome of any specific situation as is the development of the ability to deal with conflict on a more mature level (1978, pp. 72-74).

In fact, claims Gitterman (1987), a major obstacle to the creation of a mutual-aid system arises when "anger is suppressed or denied (and) communication is thwarted... By inviting negative feelings and thoughts," however, "the worker conveys interest and respect for each member and faith in their ability to communicate and work on interpersonal issues. And by overcoming them, mutual support is enhanced" (p. 17).

In spite of such strong evidence to the contrary, there still exists the myth that group workers are merely "naturals." One is either born with the talent to work with groups, or one is not. Middleman (1978) responds to

this myth by defining those skills which are specific to social group work and which, she argues, are learnable: "It seems possible to label and define these components of interaction that can stimulate between-member communication, establish performance criteria, and measure their achievement" (p. 24). Those skills are:

> (1) scanning by taking in the whole group with your eyes; maintaining contact with all members;
>
> (2) reaching for a feeling link by asking members to connect with a feeling being expressed;
>
> (3) reaching for an information link by asking members to connect with an idea, opinion, or belief that one person has expressed;
>
> (4) amplifying subtle messages by calling attention to unnoticed communicative behavior by verbalizing it;
>
> (5) toning down strong messages by verbalizing the essence of a highly affective message so that the strength of the affect is reduced and the message can be "heard" (when the others cannot deal with the messages at the intensity or pitch expressed); and
>
> (6) redirecting a message by asking an individual whose message is intended for another to direct his statement of feeling to that person (pp. 23-24).

"My own experience in teaching these group-related skill components," asserts Middleman, "has been highly encouraging" (p. 24); and the extent to which these "skill components" focus on promoting member/member interaction is noteworthy.

Almost ten years later, Middleman (1987) provides an even more elaborate list of learnable skills to which she refers as "practitioner behaviors geared specifically to the groupness of group work:"

(1) achieving a public presence by acknowledging that others will now see what one does.

(2) always thinking group and conveying this by the use of words such as 'our,' 'us,' and 'we' and by giving up some control, sharing the power, and showing that there are many helping relationships going on simultaneously within the group.

(3) scanning, i.e., taking in the entire group with one's eyes on a continuous basis and as much as possible when talking.

(4) always talking to the entire group; moving one's head around to include everyone in the circle.

(5) inviting full participation when it is not balanced and a few seem to dominate.

(6) being there for each member by expressing interest and concern for **all** continuously throughout all sessions.

(7) selecting communication patterns purposefully; making a judgment about the most facilitative format for the stage/situation of the group and setting it in motion at the start of the session or at any time if a change of pace seems warranted.

(8) reaching for the feeling link among members by asking members to connect when a feeling has been expressed.

(9) reaching for an information link by asking members to connect when an idea has been expressed and others can respond as well as the worker.

(10) amplifying subtle messages or calling attention to unnoticed communication by verbalizing it when one person's behavior is incongruent with the situation and no one else seems to notice.

(11) toning down strong messages when others cannot deal with the intensity of the pitch of the message as it was expressed; i.e., message was too `loud.'

(12) redirecting a message to its appropriate object when the message is being given to someone who is not the source or the subject.

(13) voicing group achievements periodically to call attention to benchmark movements, especially in the aftermath of some special experience or event.

(14) preserving group history and continuity when a comparable event or thought occurs and the group can benefit from an awareness that they have `been there' before.

(15) always turning issues back to the group, even when members appeal to the worker and the worker's supposedly superior knowledge and experience.

(16) periodically checking for consensus, especially if the communication process is lively and being controlled by a few members.

(17) reaching for difference anytime the group's thinking seems to be one-sided or biased; if only positives are expressed by the group, the worker puts out negatives, and vice versa (pp. 6-8).

Additionally, Middleman articulates four skills not only specific to social work with groups but essential as well:

(1) reinforcement of the group's verbal interaction by making statements that give recognition, support, and encouragement to member/member rather than didactic interchanges between members and worker.

(2) reinforcement of individual resources by making statements that demonstrate, request, or emphasize members' individual responses toward the group.

(3) reinforcement of group importance by making responses that give higher priority to commitment of both worker and members to the group than to other activities competing with that commitment (e.g., making statements about attendance, continuity, punctuality, etc.).

(4) reinforcement of intragroup focus by making comments that indicate that immediate interactions within the group take precedence over experiences that are or have been external to the group (1987, p. 8).

Middleman is not the only one to have articulated skills which are regarded as "group-specific." Years earlier, Trecker (1955) suggests a number of skills specific to social work with groups, among which several are specific to developing, enhancing, and sustaining the mutual-aid potential of a group. They are:

(1) skill in gaining the acceptance of the group and in relating himself to the group on a positive professional basis.

(2) skill in helping individuals in the group to accept one another and to join with the group in common pursuits.

(3) skill in judging the developmental level of the group to determine what the level is, what the group needs, and how quickly the group can be expected to move. This calls for skill in direct observation of groups as a basis for analysis and judgment.

(4) skill in helping the group to express ideas, work out objectives, clarify immediate goals, and see both its potentialities and limitations as a group.

(5) skill in determining, interpreting, assuming, and modifying his own role with the group.

(6) skill in helping group members to participate, to locate leadership among themselves, and to take responsibility for their own activities.

(7) skill in controlling his own feelings about the group and (in studying) each new situation with a high degree of objectivity.

(8) skill in helping groups to release their own feelings, both positive and negative. He must be skillful in helping groups to analyze situations as a part of the working-through of group or intergroup conflicts.

(9) skill in guiding group thinking so that interests and needs will be revealed and understood.

(10) skill in helping groups to develop programs which they want as a means through which their needs may be met.

(11) skill in locating and then acquainting the group with various helpful resources which can be utilized by them for program purposes.

(12) skill in helping certain individual members to make use of specialized services by means of referral when they have needs which cannot be met within the group.

(13) skill in recording the developmental processes that are going on as he works with the group.

(14) skill in using his records and in helping the group to review its experiences as a means of improvement (pp. 36-37).

"To summarize," concludes Trecker,

> it may be said that professional group work skill represents the worker's conscious application of knowledge, understanding, and principles in working with individuals and groups in defined situations (p. 37).

Hartford (1964) also provides a guideline for culling that which is specific to working with groups from generic social work. Note the extent to which unity through member/member interaction is stressed by continuous reference to "group" rather than to individual members:

(1) facilitation of relationship between and among members;

(2) diagnosis or assessment...of the group;

(3) systematic observation and assessment of... groups;

(4) forming, continuing, and terminating groups;

(5) intervention in group processes;

(6) facilitating and guiding the group;

(7) involvement of group members in planning;

(8) use of group-specific program media;

(9) use of professional judgment in choice of actions related to groups (p. 9).

Glassman and Kates (1986) also articulate worker skills based on nine social work values and related group norms which need specific encouragement in the social work group (pp. 153-159):

(1) explicit acknowledgement that all members will share in decision-making and acknowledgement and attention to differences;

value: inherent worth

group norm: egalitarianism

(2) lending a vision of mutual aid by inviting collective participation, pointing out competitiveness, redirecting communication;

value: mutual responsibility toward one another

group norms: caring, mutual aid, cooperation

(3) allowance for differences; discussing membership criteria, especially with regard to differences; preventing scapegoating;

value: right to belong

group norm: inclusivity

(4) scanning for reactions; creating space for the silent members; open valuing of all members' contributions;

value: right to be heard

group norm: open participation

(5) encouraging openness, group decision-making, collaborative programming; reflection of process;

value: right to self-determination

group norms: examination of and distribution of power

(6) asking directly; recognizing reactions in terms of stages of group development; encouraging feedback;

value: worker accountability

group norm: direct expression

(7) encouraging open and free communication and encouraging differences;

value: free speech and expression

group norms: open communication system

(8) accepting differences and direct acknowledgement of them as all right, even helpful;

value: difference is enriching

group norm: diversity

(9) acknowledging change is up to individuals; fostering role flexibility; encouraging practice in group for external use;

value: freedom of choice

group norm: freedom to change

"In the pre-group and early group sessions the worker specifically states a desire to create a system that values caring, mutual aid, cooperation, and respect for differences rather than leaving their emergence to chance...(and by)...being explicit the worker becomes less a control agent and more a partner in the experience" (p. 152).

Finally, Gitterman (1989) also presents a list of skills to build what he labels as a "mutual support" system. "To build a mutual support system," claims Gitterman, "the worker helps group members to develop a sense of commonality and integration. To facilitate achievement of this essential group task" requires that

the worker also have specific skills:

> (1) directing members' transactions to each other...the worker attempts to help members to talk directly to each other;
>
> (2) inviting members to build on each other's contributions...by linking a member's comment to those of others...the worker encourages members to become involved with each other;
>
> (3) reinforcing mutual support and assistance norms...the worker encourages and reinforces cooperative mutual support norms...by modeling, teaching, and crediting expression;
>
> (4) examining group sanctions...by helping members to examine their patterns for expression of approval and disapproval... When members are clear about what behaviors are preferred, permitted, proscribed and prohibited, they are likely to be less anxious and more available to each other;
>
> (5) encouraging collective action and activities ...by experiencing collective successes, the group becomes a source of mutual support and satisfaction;
>
> (6) facilitating mutual support and interpersonal integration and reducing conflict and stress by clarifying members' tasks and role responsibilities...
>
> (7) structuring collective decision making...by providing a structure for decision making and eliminat(ing) disabling criticisms and harshness;
>
> (8) identifying and focusing on salient group themes (pp. 12-16).

Even further, to develop a balance between members' needs for "integration and individuation," the worker must have the following skill:

(9) reaching for discrepant perceptions and opinion;

(10) inviting and `chasing' individual members to participate; and

(11) creating emotional and physical space for individual members (pp. 12-16).

Finally, Gitterman concurs with the position of Galinsky and Schopler (1977), who argue that attention by the worker to group composition is "a basic means of avoiding destructive interpersonal developments" (p. 92):

> group composition, another professional task, has a profound influence upon interpersonal processes. For the development of optimal mutual support, group members require both stability of compositional homogeneity and the diversity from compositional heterogeneity. Ideally, both should be present... (and it is the)...worker (who) must assume responsibility for group composition (p. 8).

In conclusion, a consensus clearly exists that the capacity to recognize the role of mutual aid in the small-group process and to understand the worker's task as helping the group develop into a mutual-aid system by using specific skills has major implications regarding quality of practice in social work with groups, as defined by social work values generally and by social group work values, even more specifically.

Attending to the group processes, i.e., the "groupness" of the group, is perceived as the primary means for creating that mutual-aid system. Throughout the years this attention has been alternately referred to

as: "helping to set the stage, of helping to provide the suitable environment" (Newstetter, 1935, p. 294); as enabling the group to function in such a way that group interaction as well as activities contribute to the growth (Coyle, 1949, p. 11); as helping members take charge of their "corporate affairs" (Wilson and Ryland, 1949, p. 66); as setting in motion "a process ... that takes place in such a way that the change that takes place in the material is effected with the greatest degree of consideration for and utilization of the quality and capacity of the material" (Phillips, 1957, p. 6); as helping members participate "collaboratively ... in decision-making processes" (Northen, 1969, p. 7); as "further(ing) linkages between members as they engage in active participation in group building" (Papell and Rothman, 1980, p. 12); and as enabling the group to become a "Group" - an entity which has the capacity to become greater than the mere sum of its parts (Hartford, 1964). Whatever the particular reference, however, that the worker's attention has as its end the development of the small group into a mutual-aid system is a clear commonality.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON SOCIAL WORK WITH GROUPS

As much literature as exists claiming the need for skill in social work with groups, there has been little if any research on what social work practitioners are actually doing "out there." As evidenced by Galinsky and Schopler (1977), Rooney et al. (1981), West (1985), Birnbaum et al. (1989), and Wayne and Garland (1990), among others, there has been some exploration of the world of practice at the broadest level which has indicated that many social workers appear to be currently practicing with groups without benefit of informed social work skill. Aside from reviewing the literature written by practitioners to describe their groups, little investigation has been carried out, however, into what it is, exactly, that practitioners are doing in their practice; hence, this exploration into approach to practice.

There is of course no shortage of twentieth century small-group study (Garvin, 1987b). Most of that body of research has been carried out from sociological and psychological perspectives with particular focus on the study of group forces and the ways in which participation meets individual needs. Among the most well-known studies

which have influenced the development of group work theory are the study of group contagion (Le Bon, 1950); of the relationship between group size and participation (Simmel, 1950); of interpersonal relationships (Moreno, 1934; Jennings, 1950); of how emotional reactions to the group leader affect interaction (Freud, 1922); of how emotional responses of members influence their ability to accomplish the work of the group (Bion, 1950); of leadership style, (Lippitt et al., 1939); of group-level phenomena (McDougall, 1920); and of differences between the primary group and other group forms (Cooley, 1909).

Research from the psychosocial perspective has not maintained pace, however, reflected by the fact that the percentage of journal publications dealing with research appears to be decreasing slightly (Rothman and Fike, 1987). Further, for many years, the mandate to build a scientifically-sound professional knowledge base for social work generally and for work with groups more specifically resulted, not illogically, in the design of research toward theory-building (Schwartz, 1963). Ergo, little field research has taken place with an eye toward assessing practitioner effectiveness (Garvin, 1987b).

Moreover, most of the research which has been implemented (Garvin, 1981; Toseland and Rivas, 1984; Brower and Garvin, 1989) has pertained to the individual

- even in the study of groups. While 64% of all the research literature has presented findings related to the individual, only 3.5% has presented findings related to groups (Glisson, 1986). In other words, even if the research pertains to groups, it is the variation in individuals - particularly change as a result of an introduced stimulus - rather than the variation in the group which provides data for drawing conclusions about the group (Reid and Hanrahan, 1981).

Nonetheless, some psychosocial research of groups and their dynamics was implemented during the earlier part of this century by such individuals as Coyle, Feldstein, Newcomb, Newstetter, Redl, Sherif, Thrasher, Whyte (Garvin, 1987b), and which has had direct bearing on social work practice with groups. Some of these studies were implemented through highly controlled laboratory experiments, while others were implemented through the study of groups in their natural settings. In a desire to build the mandated scientific base for the social work profession, however, much of the research - particularly into the 1950's and 1960's - was geared to developing a better understanding of group forces rather than on examining approach to practice, or "method" (Garvin, 1987b).

More recently, psychosocial studies have looked at group composition (Shalinsky, 1969; Nixon, 1979; Shaw, 1981; Thomas and Fink, 1963) including such factors as race (Davis, 1979; Brower et al., 1984) and gender (Martin and Shanahan, 1983); at group development (Garland et al., 1973); at group structure and organization (Garvin, 1983); at task implementation and goal attainment (McGrath, 1984; Resnick and Patti, 1980); and have compared the effectiveness of the group approach with casework (Toseland, 1984). Nonetheless, in spite of efforts to study the small group, there remains a scarcity of research on the group as the unit of analysis in order to understand the group - not the individual in the group - (Glisson, 1986) and on practitioner characteristics and their effects on group process (Bostwick, 1987).

Work with groups according to behavior modification theories has gained much popularity in the last 20 years, a status reflected both in research as well as theoretical literature. Consequently, although there has been a significant upward trend in the study of small groups over the last 20 years, the great majority of it has been on the evaluation of structured approaches to work with groups (Reid and Hanrahan, 1981).

In sum, most of the psychosocial research on groups has been devoted to better understanding group dynamics

in order to build a theoretical base for practice and to gain insight into the experience of membership in order to gain greater capacity to effect change in human behavior. Furthermore, some social work research has mixed its metaphors, so to speak, by analyzing the individual in order to understand the group as a whole or by drawing conclusions about individuals from having analyzed the group. Contemporary research is primarily characterized by "individual professional curiosity" (Rothman and Fike, 1987, p. 96) and so concentrates on small-scale analysis of specific group-based services. Finally, although there has been some analysis of leadership style, particularly with a view to building theory for practice, little research has focused on quality of leadership with the express intent of exploring philosophical nature of practice (Bostwick, 1987).

Although this study is not considered a study of effectiveness, per se, it does attempt to explore professional practice for the express purpose of assessing the nature of the impact of professional education on skill in work with groups. As noted earlier, its basic assumption is that generally speaking there is, in fact, a relationship between education and skill; and the purpose of this study is to attempt to discover the nature of that relationship by exploring one component of

practice. It might be said, therefore, that inherent in the examination of approach to practice is the issue of effectiveness. For these purposes, however, effectiveness is not conceptualized from the point of view of output. Rather, it is conceptualized from the point of view of input.

Effectiveness studies - studies of the professional process - provide extraordinary challenges to social work research. Those challenges range from an understanding of the great complexity (often referred to as the "black box" dilemma) in attempting to quantify and qualify variables to the issues which are inherently raised when judgment of effectiveness of a system (in social work referred to as "method") is based on the study of the individual who implements that system. A flaw which is rarely if ever mentioned in Fisher's famous content review of casework research (1973) is that the practitioner is presumed, a priori, to be an effective instrument in the social work process without any investigation into the extent to which the worker meets certain criteria of knowledge and skill. One cannot help but wonder to what extent that is an appropriate assumption. For example, how reasonable can it be to draw conclusions about effectiveness of group practice when assessment (of that "system" or "method") is based on

the practice of an individual who has no education or training in implementing that method?

It is this writer's opinion that the profession is at a point at which Fisher's famous question, "Is casework effective?" might well be rephrased as: "Is the caseworker effective?" There is no lack of evidence that the psychosocial approach to helping - at whatever level the transaction - is theoretically sound. Now it would behoove the profession to move beyond the point of questioning (defending?) the validity of the system itself to examining the capacity of those who actualize that system by building a portrait of those who are in charge of bearing its values - particularly in light of changing educational curricula - and assessing the extent to which it is satisfied with the bearers of its values.

As has been reiterated throughout this review of the literature, the basic ingredients in mutual aid are valuation of relationship, membership control over group affairs, and assumption of decision-making, i.e., self-determination:

> There is virtually nothing that occurs in the life of a small group which does not have bearing upon decision-making and vice versa (Lowy, 1978, p. 110).

Unfortunately, however, most of the research on decision-making in groups has been conducted in laboratory settings rather than among "group-in-the-raw" (ibid). And so, in

sum, the picture of the extent to which groups led by social workers routinely engage in the management of their corporate affairs, the extent to which practitioners impede or encourage that process, and the extent to which education has an impact on this process still remains vague.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE: CONCLUSION

Social work scholars and practitioners alike continue to be appalled at the easy manner in which colleagues, ignorant of their power to harm as well as heal, work with groups without education and training. Evidence that group-specific skills exist and are requisite to sound social work practice with groups is offered in abundance by the literature; and it is this evidence which justifies the study of the impact of education on current practice with groups, particularly when work with groups is in increasing demand.

The literature appears to support the major beliefs which drive this study: (1) that social group work theory conceptualizes the small group as a mutual-aid system; (2) that the group worker's fundamental role is to catalyze that mutual aid; and (3) that exploring the

potential influence of education on the extent to which social workers actualize that role is a viable and timely inquiry.

"Mutual Aid Among the Savages"

> Within the tribe everything is shared in common; every morsel of food is divided among all present; and if the savage is alone in the woods, he does not begin eating before he has loudly shouted thrice an invitation to any one who may hear his voice to share his meal...
>
> In short, within the tribe the rule of `each for all' is supreme, so long as the separate family has not yet broken up the tribal unity...
>
> (A)t no period of man's life were wars the **normal** state of existence. While warriors exterminated each other, and the priests celebrated their massacres, the masses continued to live their daily life... And it is one of the most interesting studies to follow that life of the masses; to study the means by which they maintained their own social organization, which was based upon their own conceptions of equity, mutual aid, and mutual support...even when they were submitted to the most ferocious theocracy or autocracy in the State.[1]

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1 Petr Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution, London: William Heinemann, 1908, pp. 112-114.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

* * * * *

THE RESEARCH QUESTION RESTATED

This study was carried out for the purpose of exploring and describing differences, if any, among social work practitioners' approaches to professional practice with groups. More specifically, the question was:

> To what extent does there appear to be a relationship between professional education in the group work method and the tendency of practitioners to utilize mutual aid as a model for practice with groups?

This study constitutes a preliminary inquiry into one specific area of social work practice only and as such does not claim to be a definitive study of professional social work practice with groups. It is a study of trends and tendencies, not of absolutes.

STUDY DESIGN

Given the paucity of research on social workers' group leadership behaviors, an exploratory/descriptive

design was considered to be the most effective strategy for pursuing this area of inquiry.

Observation would be the ideal methodology for studying worker behaviors. Direct social work practice is conducted in an atmosphere of privacy and confidentiality, however; and the potential for obtaining useful data by observation of process is often mitigated by reactivity. In the alternative, therefore, workers were asked to describe and discuss their approaches to practice. To increase reliability, respondents were also asked to give examples as often as possible to illustrate the nature of their interventions.

The following strategy was developed for implementing this study:

A. design and development of a data collection instrument;

B. non-random selection of respondents;

C. collection of quantitative and qualitative data through the use of semi-structured interviews;

D. systematic organization of data;

E. content analysis of data;

F. acquisition of expert commentary on findings;

G. presentation of implications;

H. assessment of research methodology;

I. suggested directions for further study.

DATA COLLECTION

Thirty semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather quantitative and qualitative data using an interview schedule of closed and open-ended questions which had been previously mailed to the respondents (copy attached as Appendix A). Encouraging perusal of the questions prior to the interview was based on the belief that as a complex system of intellectual and physical activities, social work practice is not easy to articulate. Since the purpose of this study was not to test practitioners but rather to explore their approaches to practice, their careful deliberation of the questions toward thoughtful response was regarded not as a threat to validity but rather as an advantage.

Once the practitioners agreed to participate in the study, they received along with the aforementioned interview schedule a letter confirming their participation, explaining the purpose of the study, and insuring confidentiality of the interview as well as anonymity in any ensuing report (copy attached as Appendix B).

Except for one contact by telephone, the interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis over a 90-minute period usually in respondents' work settings.

All of the interviews were carried out by the researcher, and copious notes were taken on a worksheet which duplicates the interview schedule except for the inclusion of short references to the issue that each question is intended to address (copy attached as Appendix C). These references were included on the worksheet to help the interviewer in maintaining the focus of the dialogue and to elaborate, rephrase, or clarify any questions which posed some difficulty to the respondents.

Each interview was also taped to insure full capture of detail.

LABELS

Throughout the remainder of this work, the group-work-educated respondent will be referred to as "GW" in the singular, as "GWS" in the plural, and as "GWSS" when referring to these respondents collectively as a subsample. Likewise, throughout the remainder of this work the non-social-group-work-educated respondent will

be referred to as "NGW" in the singular, as "NGWS" in the plural, and as "NGWSS" when referring to these respondents collectively as a subsample.

TERMS

For purposes of this study, "social group work education," "training," and "mutual-aid approach to practice," were defined as follows:

Social Group Work Education

Social group work education refers to the completion of three or more group work practice courses in an accredited two-year graduate school of social work in the U.S.

Training

Training refers to all post-graduate learning episodes, including but not limited to workshops, seminars, courses, supervision, and co-leadership, offered by professional (MSW-level or higher) social workers and designed specifically to increase theoretical

knowledge of or enhance skill in social work with groups. Population-specific training is not included in this definition.

In other words, training which is individual-oriented, such as "coping with the paranoid group member" or "group work with a psychiatric population" rather than method-oriented, such as "fostering group cohesion" is not conceptualized as training in social work with groups. Extensive effort was made to distinguish between population-specific training on work with groups (e.g., "work with mentally ill adults") from training aimed at enhancing method-specific skill.

The basis for such a distinction is that population-specific training focuses on helping a practitioner gain deeper insight into the intrapsychic needs and dynamics of the individual, with attention to generic leadership skills remaining relatively incidental. In other words, the primary purpose of the training is to increase knowledge about a certain client population, not to increase knowledge about method or to enhance method-specific skill.

In addition, training on work with groups offered by social work practitioners was distinguished from training on work with groups offered by professionals from other disciplines, such as psychologists and psychiatrists.

The basis for this particular distinction is the belief that social work practice theories and principles differ significantly from theories and principles of other helping professions. Consequently, the extent to which a respondent has been exposed to those other theories, principles, and practice methods is worth some consideration in exploring approach to practice.

A Mutual-Aid Approach to Practice

A mutual-aid approach to practice refers to a professional approach to work with groups which has as its driving force a combination of three inseparable elements: 1) belief in the potential for multiple helping relationships in the group, 2) a primary intent of helping group members harness and use this potential, and 3) a perspective of professional role based on a set of specific skills (see Phillips, 1954; Schwartz, 1961; Schwartz and Zalba, 1971; Tropp, 1978; Shulman, 1984; Glassman and Kates, 1986; Middleman, 1987; Gitterman, 1989).

The following types of interventions were used as a basis for formulating practice-related questions intended to assess the extent to which specific aspects of approach reflect a mutual-aid model:

(1) making statements which show that there are many helping relationships within the group.

(2) making statements that recognize, support, and encourage member-to-member interaction.

(3) giving the group as much decision-making power as possible given its composition, purpose, and setting.

(4) visually scanning the entire group as much as possible while talking.

(5) visually scanning the entire group as much as possible while listening to members.

(6) verbally inviting full participation when a few members seem to dominate the session.

(7) asking members to connect to one another when a feeling has been expressed.

(8) asking members to connect to one another when an idea has been expressed.

(9) asking members to respond to one another when differences have been expressed.

THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

As noted, the interview schedule is comprised of 22 questions, each of which addresses an aspect of background or of general or specific approach to practice with groups; and it is the responses to these questions which constitute the data of this study. This section is

devoted to articulating each question on the schedule and providing a rationale for the inclusion of the practice-related questions. The first section, entitled "Background," presents those questions which address education, work history, post-graduate training, and personal group membership. The following section, entitled "Practice," presents those questions which address approach to practice, beginning with those pertaining to professional perspectives of work with groups and ending with the more specific questions pertaining to approach to practice as that approach does/does not reflect a mutual-aid model of work with groups.

Background

Education

Question: Where and when did you receive your MSW? How much, if any, and in what way(s) was your curriculum devoted to work with groups?

Respondents were asked to provide the following data: graduate school attended; student status (two-year vs. one-year-resident, full-time vs. part time, etc.); nature of curriculum; extent to which curriculum

included practice on work with groups; and number of years since graduation.

Experience in Work With Groups

Question: What types of groups have you led since you received your MSW (i.e., populations, problems, settings, etc.)?

To provide a full picture of their work experience with groups, respondents provided the following data for each group they had led/co-led: auspice, purpose of group (needs/issues/goals around which group was formed); content (what took place during sessions, e.g., discussion or activities, etc.); structure (open/closed membership, size, frequency of meetings, etc.); and duration (time limited, short or long-term, open ended, single-session, etc.).

Training

Question: Have you had any post-graduate training specific to working with groups? If so, please describe this training as fully and accurately as possible.

Respondents were asked to estimate as accurately as possible, after having eliminated all population-

specific training, the number of hours involved in each and every training experience in work with groups that had been offered by a professional social worker.

Influence of Personal Background on Attitude Toward Work With Groups

> Question: Are there any experiences not covered in Questions 20 and 21 which you believe have particularly affected (either positively or negatively) your perspective of groups as a helping method? If so, please elaborate.

Respondents were asked to share any and all personal experiences not previously noted which they believed had substantially influenced their thinking, attitudes, or feelings about work with groups.

Practice

This broad category is divided into two sections. The first section entitled "Professional Perspectives" explores general attitudes toward social work with groups as a method of practice. The second section entitled "Approach to Practice" investigates specific components of practice believed to reflect the degree to which approach reflects a mutual-aid model.

Professional Perspectives

General Attitudes Toward Work with Groups

Question: What word would best describe how you feel when you're asked to form a new group?

Question: What's the greatest caution you'd share with someone about to lead a group for the first time?

Question: What's the one greatest piece of wisdom or advice you'd share with someone about to lead a group for the first time?

Since general attitudes can often be summed up rather succinctly, respondents were asked to share their attitudes toward work with groups through a few "high concepts," (borrowed from the film industry and denoting a very short descriptive phrase to give the essence of a story). To that end, respondents were asked to answer the above-noted questions.

Theoretical Basis for Work With Groups

Question: Is there any particular literature you would assign to someone about to work with groups for the first time?

Based on a belief that practitioners are likely to recommend professional practice literature which is

congruent with their own philosophies and which guides their own approaches, respondents were asked to respond to this question.

Membership

> Question: Do you have an opinion about the types of populations for which groups are the a) best suited? b) least well suited?

A major tenet of social work with groups is that mutual aid is less a reflection of the fit between method and population per se than it is a reflection of clarity of group purpose. The concept of group purpose is central to the group method. It represents the mission of the group as a system, a mission which reaches beyond the scope of individual goals; and it is only upon the establishment of a group purpose that a basis exists upon which members can develop mutual-aid relationships. In turn, the central issue of group membership is less one of identifying obstacles to membership than it is one of identifying an appropriate and meaningful group purpose. Too often, however, group purpose is perceived as a relatively amorphous idea around which individuals collect none too neatly to realize their own loosely formulated goals rather than as the powerful nucleus which like the

atom tightly binds the members to one another and around which all things happen. Without a strong group purpose, it is the meeting of individual goals which takes center stage for both worker and members, and as such, the group becomes context rather than system. Assuming that attitude influences approach to any activity, respondents' opinions about which types of clients might be well served through the small group are not insignificant.

Respondents were asked to draw not only on their own direct practice experience but to think about other populations as well in answering this the question.

Approach to Practice

Composition

Question: What do you think makes for good or bad group composition?

Although professional ideals are rarely maintained with complete integrity in the real world, professional practice nonetheless dictates that ideals must be kept in mind while the worker struggles with the art of the possible. Group composition is too often dictated by such factors as who's at the agency on a rainy night, who signs up first, who has a pleasant personality, who

has nothing else to do, who has a friend who's joining, who has transportation, who can fill the space, etc., etc. Social group work theory, however, demands that consideration of group composition begin at a very different place. It posits that mutual aid is not an automatic consequence of a group experience. In the interest of creating a climate in which individuals can give as well as take help from one another, some thought needs to be given to the factors which might facilitate or impede that process. If, however, the practitioner is primarily interested in conducting groups in which the primary helper is the worker and in which members learn through analogy, the extent to which individuals can give help is less important. In this case, the major determinant in considering group composition is the individual's capacity for drawing analogies from other members' situations. (Northen, 1988; Bertcher and Maple, 1971; Hartford, 1978; Wilson and Ryland, 1949; Gitterman, 1989). A question about composition was included in the interview schedule, therefore, to assess the extent to which practitioners perceive the existence of a relationship between composition and mutual aid.

Leadership

Question: Please describe how you see your role/s in a group and for each give an example of how you have actualized that role during any past group session.

Social workers adopt a variety of roles in their practice, roles which evolve from their theoretical orientations and which guide their actions. Some roles inform, others learn; some facilitate, others demand; some liberate, others restrain; and some advocate, while others challenge. In any and all cases, to the extent that roles are adopted in a conscious attempt to develop and reinforce the multiplicity of helping relationships in a group, they may be said to encourage mutual aid (Wilson and Ryland, 1949; Hartford, 1964, 1978; Schwartz and Zalba, 1971; Papell and Rothman, 1980; Middleman, 1987).

In order to evaluate the extent to which mutual aid-related roles dominate their practice with groups, respondents were asked to identify the major roles they adopt as group leaders and to describe for each role one or more past actions which they believe represent the tasks associated with that role.

Setting the Stage

Question: How would you state the goals of any first group meeting? Please think back to your latest "first session" and recall as best you can what you said and did to go about reaching those goals.

Question: What are the norms you hope will develop in a group? Can you describe some ways in which you help them come about?

Whatever happens the very first time individuals meet as a group is crucial. Actions formulate expectations and set precedents. Verbal and nonverbal expressions determine tone. And together, these factors set the stage for the group's future. On that basis, two questions were posed to elicit respondents' opinions about how the stage should look when their particular play begins, so to speak. The first question pertains to goals; the second pertains to norms.

Goals

Any number of goals can vie for attention when a group first meets. Practitioners often feel pressured to do much with little time, and in response to that pressure, they set priorities. To the extent that the worker prioritizes goals aimed at helping members envision how they can help one another, that practitioner

may be said to be setting the stage for mutual aid (Papell and Rothman, 1980).

Norms

This question addresses the kinds of norms the worker would like to see develop and established in the group over time. The central issue is the extent to which the worker acknowledges and emphasizes norms which encourage mutual aid.

Norms should not be confused with rules. Rules are formalized (even if unspoken) often static sanctions on behavior. Norms are adopted out of a process. They evolve into standards of behavior which reflect the "usual way of doing things here." Norms may evolve discretely, but they set such strong precedents that once set in motion, they are extraordinarily difficult to challenge.

If a practitioner wishes to create a climate in which it is considered "normal" for interaction to be meaningful and spontaneous, in which it is considered "normal" for group members to be expert as well as learner, and in which it is considered "normal" for group members to assume some degree of responsibility for the group's affairs, then from the very beginning of the group's life, the practitioner must use words

and deeds consciously to encourage those norms (Northen, 1988; Schwartz and Zalba, 1971; Papell and Rothman, 1980; Konopka, 1983; Glassman and Kates; 1986). On this basis, respondents were asked to share what they do and say from the very beginning of their groups to express approval of certain "ways of being and doing things" and to discourage others.

Control

> Question: To what extent do you like to maintain control over what goes on in a group? Can you give any examples of ways in which you do/do not maintain control?

Social group work theory states clearly that mutual aid can be effected only to the extent that group members are given the opportunity to decide what to do and how to do it. In order for the group to develop into a system of mutual aid, members must share control over what happens in and to the group (Wilson and Ryland, 1949; Kaiser, 1958; Northen, 1988; Schwartz and Zalba, 1971; Bernstein, 1973; Tropp, 1978; Lowy, 1978). Since group members are rarely in a position to wrest control from the worker, power is accessible to members only to the extent that it is offered by the worker. Therefore, the degree to which practitioners assume control over what goes on in their

groups and the ways in which they maintain and share control is not incidental to understanding their approaches to practice. Feelings about control reflect in capsule form attitudes about the helping relationship -- about who can and should be doing what for, to, and with whom.

Time and Expectations

> Question: How does the passage of time (over the life of the group) affect your expectations of members? Can you recall a past group situation which reflected those changed expectations?

> Question: How does the passage of time (over the life of the group) affect your expectations of yourself as group leader? Can you recall a past group situation which reflected those changed expectations?

These two questions address the extent to which any stage theory appears to be an integral component of approach to practice. The central issue is the extent to which the passage of time influences workers' expectations of members and of self, and if so, the manner in which those expectations are associated with developing the group as a mutual-aid system.

Social group work theory attends in great detail to the concept of group evolution over time. Helping a

group become a working mutual-aid system is a process and as such requires the passage of time. In fact, time is the very impetus for the development of reciprocal helping relationships among members. Consequently, some time-based framework must be utilized to judge the nature and quality of those relationships and to formulate appropriate expectations about members and worker alike (Northen, 1988; Schwartz and Zalba, 1971; Garland, 1978; Lowy, 1978; Shulman, 1979; Konopka, 1983). Without an awareness of how time and mutual aid are related, however, it is likely (and not totally illogical) that practitioners will rely on ordinary common sense to interpret what happens in a group and to decide how to respond. Unfortunately, however, ordinary common sense is not enough to guide practice at whatever (any) level.

A thorough understanding of stage theory and its implications for practice generally and on the group's maturation as a mutual-aid system more specifically is also essential for carrying out appropriate intervention. For example, common sense may suggest that new members are nervous and tend to engage in superficial interaction, that they do not necessarily relate positively to one another, and that they need reassurance about rights and obligations. Common sense may even suggest that over time members will form special

attachments and will also become more meaningful in their interaction. On the other hand, it is unlikely that this same fund of common sense will comfort the worker when members begin to challenge authority. Nor is it likely to help the worker cope with the seeming chaos which almost always envelopes any real work of the group. Nor is the untrained worker likely to understand that it is correct and proper for the helping relationships which develop through that work to take precedence over the worker/member relationships. Nor is the untrained worker likely to understand what needs to be said and done to "work him/herself out of" a job over time, so to speak, all the while helping members "work themselves into" that job. Finally, it is unlikely that ordinary common sense will be enough to guide the practitioner as a group struggles with and through termination, often leaving the worker baffled, even disheartened. The above two-noted questions ask practitioners to address the impact of time on their expectations of members and on their expectations of themselves, as group leaders.

Critical Incidents

Question: Please think back to a time when a group member was in a role that had a negative impact on the group and describe that situation and your intervention, if any.

Question: Please think back to a time when a conflict occurred in a group and describe how it came about, what actually happened (who did or said what) and how (if) the conflict was resolved.

Question: Please think back to a time when an important decision affecting the group needed to be made and describe how that decision was reached.

Question: Have you ever led a group in which a member terminated his or her membership prematurely? If so, please describe to the best of your recollection what happened.

Critical incidents are incidents which occur in a group at one or more moments which beg intervention, the nature of which critically affects the group's future. Sometimes these moments are referred to as "choice points," implying that by choice of action, the worker causes members to conceptualize membership in a certain way or causes the group as a whole to function differently. How the worker behaves at such times may set major precedents for process, such as what kind of relationships the participants should develop, how they should interact, how decisions should be made, the extent

to which group conflict is acceptable, etc. Or, the worker may convey messages about the meaning of group membership and how the members should conceptualize the experience, such as why they are in the group in the first place, who should define individual goals and group purpose, what the content will be, who has authority over who and what, etc. In either case, the manner in which the critical incident is managed by the worker has a lasting impact on the group system by laying the groundwork for the future.

Based on the belief that examples of intervention would tend to reflect a general modus operandi, respondents were asked to share some case illustrations of past interventions in certain types of critical incidents. The central issue is the extent to which the worker encourages group members to take an active role at these critical times, i.e., the extent to which critical incidents are perceived as group rather than individual issues. The worker who desires to help a group develop into a system of mutual aid will encourage members at every possible opportunity to share responsibility for what happens in the group and how it happens. Hence, the greater the demand for member participation in the management of critical incidents, the greater the interest in catalyzing the

group's potential for mutual aid (Coyle, 1949; Wilson and Ryland, 1949; Kaiser, 1958; Northen, 1988; Schwartz and Zalba, 1971; Bernstein, 1978; Garland and Kolodny, 1978; Lowy, 1978; Papell and Rothman, 1980; Konopka, 1983).

A range of critical situations which provide the worker with clear opportunity to steer the group toward developing their mutual-aid skills are represented by the following four types of incidents: the "difficult" member, group conflict, decision-making, and premature termination - each of which incident is addressed by one of the above-stated questions.

Evaluating the Group's Success

Question: How did you evaluate the success of your last group?

All too often, like other professionals, social workers neglect consumer feedback to assess their effectiveness as service providers. As a result, social services often miss the point. If group members are to have a say in what the group does and how it does what it does, however, then it is a logical extension of that right that members have a voice in evaluating that experience (Hartford, 1964; Northen, 1988).

With this membership right in mind, respondents were asked to describe how they evaluated the success of their last group based on the assumption was that the process which they described would reflect their general approach to this task.

Mutual Aid: Differences in Perspective

> Question: How would you define mutual aid? Could you give an example of an instance in a group that in your opinion really reflected mutual aid "in action?"

There is theoretical consensus in the professional literature that mutual aid extends far beyond mere expression of sympathy.

Mutual aid embraces many types of possible interchanges which are ultimately helpful, including those which are confrontational in nature. This is not to say that expressions of sympathy do not reflect mutual aid. They may or may not. Sometimes it is more helpful for thinking to be challenged, however; and there are many moments in which expression of difference is far more helpful than murmurs of compassion.

In sum, mutual aid results as much from the process of confrontation as from advocacy; and so, respondents were asked to present their definitions of mutual aid

(Coyle, 1949; Wilson and Ryland, 1949; Bernstein, 1978; Hartford, 1978; Papell and Rothman, 1980; Konopka, 1983; Shulman, 1984; Middleman, 1987; Northen, 1988).

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

A small portion of the data gathered by this study were quantitative in nature, such as information related to education, professional practice, training, etc. These data were analyzed accordingly and are presented in the following chapter on findings.

Content analysis was carried out at three levels: The first level involved single-item analysis to search for its meaning and implications:

(1) for each respondent,

(2) within each subsample, and

(3) between the two subsamples.

The second level involved a search for broader meaning and implications, again:

(1) for each respondent,

(2) within each subsample, and

(3) between the two subsamples, by collapsing closely-related items into larger units of analysis.

The third level of analysis involved conceptualizing each subsample as a discrete unit of analysis to search for major themes of similarity and difference between the two subsamples and for implications regarding the impact of social group work education on the extent to which approaches appear to be based on a mutual-aid model.

Following is a list of questions asked at each level of analysis:

Analysis Level One

For each respondent, the following questions were asked:

1. *in re Background*: What does this (any) response reveal about this (any) respondent's background?

2. *in re Practice*: What does this (any) response reveal or suggest about this (any) respondent's approach to a specific aspect of practice, and particularly as this aspect reflects a mutual-aid model?

For each subsample, the following questions were asked:

1. *in re Background*: What are the similarities and differences among respondents of this subsample regarding this (any) particular component of background?

2. *in re Practice*: What similarities and differences among respondents of this subsample are suggested regarding this (any) specific aspect of practice, and particularly as this aspect reflects a mutual-aid model?

In comparing the subsamples, the following questions were asked:

1. _in re Background_: Are there any significant similarities and differences between the subsamples regarding this (any) component of background? If so, what are they?

2. _in re Practice_: Are there any significant similarities and differences between the subsamples regarding this (any) specific aspect of practice, and particularly as this aspect reflects a mutual-aid model? If so, what are they?

Analysis Level Two

For each respondent, the following questions were asked:

1. _in re Background_: If the items related to background are combined or collapsed into larger units of analysis, what significant factors are revealed about this (any) respondent's background?

2. _in re Practice_: If the items related to practice are combined or collapsed into larger units of analysis, what are the most/major significant implications about this (any) respondent's approach to practice, and particularly as the approach reflects a mutual-aid model?

For each subsample, the following questions were asked:

1. _in re Background_: If items related to background are combined/collapsed into larger units of analysis, what major similarities and differences are revealed or suggested within this (either) subsample?

2. _in re Practice_: If items related to practice are combined/collapsed into larger units of analysis, what major similarities and differences regarding approach to practice, and particularly as the approach reflects a mutual-aid model, are revealed or suggested within this (either) subsample?

In comparing the subsamples, the following questions were asked:

1. _in re Background_: If items related to background are combined/collapsed into larger units of analysis, what major similarities and differences are revealed or suggested between the subsamples?

2. _in re Practice_: If items related to practice are combined/collapsed into larger units of analysis, what major similarities and differences regarding approach to practice, and particularly as the approach reflects a mutual-aid model, are revealed or suggested between the subsamples?

Analysis Level Three

In comparing the subsamples, the following questions were asked:

1. _in re Background_: How do the subsamples compare generally with regard to educational, training, and work backgrounds? What major themes regarding background are made evident through such a comparison?

2. _in re Practice_: If each subsample is conceptualized as a discrete unit of analysis, what major themes evolve from comparing the general approach to practice of practitioners who have been educated in social group work with those who have not been so educated?

3. What do the major themes imply about the impact of social group work education on practitioners' approaches to work with groups, particularly as those approaches do/do not reflect a mutual-aid model of practice?

"Mutual Aid Among the Barbarians"

> It is not possible to study primitive mankind without being deeply impressed by the sociability it has displayed since its very first steps in life...and, when we come to observe the savages whose manners of life re still those of neolithic man, we find them closely bound together by an extremely ancient clan organization which enables them to combine their individually weak forces, to enjoy life in common, and to progress. Man is no exception in nature. He also is subject to the great principle of Mutual Aid which grants the best chances of survival to those who best support each other in the struggle for life.
>
> This new institution - the clan - permitted the barbarians to pass through a most disturbed period of history without being broken into isolated families which would have succumbed in the struggle for life. New forms of culture developed...wilderness was conquered...markets and fortified centres, as well as places of public worship, were erected; conceptions of a wider union...were slowly elaborated... (T)he customary law...was elaborated...as well as a system of habits intended to prevent the oppression of the masses... This was the new form taken by the tendencies of the masses for mutual support.[1]

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[1] Petr Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution, London: William Heinemann, 1908, pp. 115-152.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

A presentation of the sample and its characteristics begins this chapter, followed by findings on respondents' general attitudes toward work with groups. Practice findings are presented in two sections, the first of which is entitled "General Attitudes Toward Work With Groups." Results of specific content analysis of approach are presented throughout the second section entitled "Approach to Practice." Finally, "Major Findings Highlighted" concludes this chapter by summarizing issues and themes of difference which appear between the subsamples.

THE SAMPLE

The population of interest consists of MSW-level social work graduates from accredited two-year schools of social work in the United States who either were working

with groups at the time of study or who had worked with groups in the recent past. The final sample was composed of 30 purposively-selected social workers. A list of practitioners who had taken at least three courses in group work at Hunter College School of Social Work was developed with the intent of reflecting a range of experience over time and in work setting; and of those who qualified, the first 15 who agreed to participate were selected to represent the group-work-educated subsample. In turn, each of these workers then recommended one or more colleagues who had not majored in work with groups to represent the non-group-work-educated subsample.

Each of the 25 women and five men who comprised the final sample was interviewed for a period of about 90 minutes using a schedule of questions specifically developed for that purpose (attached as Appendix A).

The characteristics of the sample with regard to the schools of social work respondents attended; curriculum data; post-graduate history in social work with groups; years in professional practice; types of work settings represented by respondents' history in work with groups; types of client populations represented by respondents' professional history in work with groups; and types of groups led is contained in this next section entitled "Educational Background."

Educational Background

Introduction

Thirty (30) M.S.W.-level social work practitioners in the New York City were interviewed for this study. One half of the sample represents practitioners educated in social group work; the other half represents social workers not educated in social group work.

For purposes of this study, "education in social group work" is defined as at least three (3) practice courses in social work with groups at an accredited two-year graduate social work school in the United States.

Schools of Social Work

The GWSS is comprised of graduates of Hunter College School of Social Work in New York, New York. The NGWS are graduates of New York City schools as follows: New York University School of Social Work (6); Columbia University School of Social Work (5), Hunter College School of Social Work (2), Adelphi University School of Social Work (1), and Fordham University School of Social Work (1).

Curriculum Data

As indicated by Table 1 below, the vast majority of the GWS (86%) successfully completed four semesters of

social work with groups; the remaining two GWS (14%) each successfully completed three semesters.

As is also indicated by this table, the norm for the NGWSS is successful completion of a one-semester course on work with groups. One NGW (7%) successfully completed a two-semester course at Adelphi University, while three (20%) reported no course work on work with groups. Of the remaining 11 NGWS (73%), each respondent successfully completed one-semester courses as follows: New York University (6), Columbia University (2), Hunter College (2), and Fordham University (1).

Table 1: Semesters of Group Work Education (N=30)

	GWSS (n=15)		NGWSS (n=15)	
Semesters	No.	%	No.	%
4	13	86%	-	-
3	2	14%	-	-
2	-	-	1	07%
1	-	-	11	73%
0	-	-	3	20%
Totals:	15	100%	15	100%

No detailed information was collected regarding content of the practice courses, since it was not the intent of this study to draw any detailed comparisons based on specific variables or to extend inquiry into the realm of explanation and generalization. Consequently, no assumptions have been made regarding the comparability of curriculum content.

Training

Introduction

Respondents were asked to describe their post-graduate training experiences, if any, in work with groups and, as previously noted, were asked to distinguish between method-specific and population-specific training. So few respondents reported any post-graduate training in social work at all, however, that it was possible to discuss here all references to training.

Seminars/Workshops

As Table 2 below illustrates, eight (53%) of the GWS and three (20%) of the NGWS reported never having attended post-graduate seminars or workshops in social work with groups.

Four GWS (27%) reported that they had attended post-graduate seminars or workshops in social work with groups, while no NGWS reported post-graduate training in social work with groups.

Note that in contrast, 10 (66%) NGWS reported having attended post-graduate seminars or workshops in group psychotherapy, while three (20%) GWS reported post-graduate training in group psychotherapy.

Table 2: Post-Graduate Seminars and Workshops (N=30)

	GWSS (n=15)		NGWSS (n=15)	
Seminars/Workshops	No.	%	No.	%
None	8	53%	2	14%
Social Work with Groups	4	27%	-	--
Group Psychotherapy	3	20%	10	66%
Other (e.g., Family, Gestalt)	-	--	3	20%
Totals:	15	100%	15	100%

In sum, of the GWS who did report post-graduate training through seminars and workshops, over half of them reported that the training was in social work with groups. Of the NGWS who had attended post-graduate seminars and

workshops, the vast majority reported that their training was in group psychotherapy or some other form of specialized practice. Therefore, more NGWS reported post-graduate training than GWS, their training was from outside social work.

Supervision

For this sample, professional supervision appears to focus primarily on individual counseling and other tasks, such as administrative duties. Of the entire sample, only one GWS practitioner reported having ever been supervised on her practice with groups. As a rule, supervision of practice with groups tends to occur only informally and haphazardly with peers, if at all.

Co-leadership

Only one NGW and no GWS reported having used group co-leadership as a method of post-graduate training on work with groups.

In conclusion, it would appear that members of this particular sample have received very little post-graduate training in social work with groups. Further, the little training they do report has been sponsored in the main by non social work organizations, such as psychoanalytic institutes - and more often than not, it has been oriented

toward educating practitioners about special needs of special populations rather than method.

Professional Practice

Years in Practice

Table 3 below indicates years of professional practice for the entire sample as well as for each of the two subsamples.

Note that the GWSS range is slightly smaller with slightly lower mean and median, while the NGWSS range is identical with that of the whole sample but with slightly higher mean and median.

Note further that in contrast, the GWSS mode is higher than that of the entire sample, while the NGWSS mode is comparably lower, indicating that as a whole, the GWS have been in professional practice for a somewhat longer period than have the NGWS.

Table 3: Years of Professional Practice

	N	%	Range	Mean	Median	Mode
Full Sample	30	100%	16.0	6.6	5.5	6.5
GWSS	15	50%	12.5	5.6	5.0	8.0
NGWSS	15	50%	16.0	7.6	6.5	5.0

Although analysis indicates some variation between the two subsamples with regard to years of professional practice, it does not reveal any extraordinary differences.

Work Settings

Although employment background ranges from freelance fee-for-service to full time employment, the vast majority (87%) of respondents were employed full time in a social service agency at the time of study.

Settings in which respondents worked at time of study or had worked with groups in the recent past reflect a variety of private, public, and combined funding auspices. They also reflect a wide range of organizational approach to social service delivery, some highly specialized and others, like community centers, highly diversified.

Settings in which respondents worked with groups at time of study or had worked with groups in past practice include hospitals, child welfare agencies, schools, churches, synagogues, Y's, day treatment centers, skilled nursing facilities, residences for the aged, settlement houses, community or neighborhood centers, and vocational-guidance centers.

Public auspices represented include New York City Special Services for Children; the New York City Board of Education; the Pennsylvania Board of Education; the New York City Youth Bureau, and the New York State Department of Mental Health.

At the time of study, a number of NGWS were also working with groups in their private practices.

Experience in Work with Groups

Populations

Client populations represented in this study include children from toddlers to preteens; adolescents from early teens to young adults; and adults into their latest years. A wide range of needs and issues is being addressed by this sample through the use of groups - from providing social stimulation, to enhancing life skills, to helping individuals cope with terminal illness, to providing support for their significant others.

Types of Groups Led

For each of the groups respondents were leading at time of study or which they had led in the recent past, respondents were asked to describe group purpose, (goal), content (the group's work/activity), and structure (size,

nature of membership, etc). Some of the NGWS had difficulty in articulating group purpose and tended, instead, to describe group content. Nonetheless, it was possible to develop some general categories to organize this material, and Table 3 on the next page indicates which types of groups were led by members of each subsample. Several types of groups were led by both GWS and NGWS, since many respondents were referred by colleagues in the same organization.

Table 4: Types of Groups Led

NOTE:

Except for the obvious, no frequencies regarding groups or respondents should be inferred. For example, although no GWS led any "creative expression" groups with the elderly, any number of NGWS might have led any number of such groups.

Types of Groups Led by Population	GWS	NGWS
Elderly (Healthy, Frail, Disabled)		
Creative Expression		X
Crisis Intervention		X
Disability Management	X	X
Elder Abuse Prevention		X
Leadership Training	X	
Life Stage Management	X	X
Peer Counseling Training		X
Social/Recreational	X	
Adults (Healthy, Physically Disabled)		
Camp Counselor Training	X	
Community Action		X
Coping with Disease	X	X
Coping with Special-Needs Children	X	X
Marriage Counseling	X	
Rape Counseling		X
Support - Abstinence from Chem. Dependence		
Support - Caregivers of Severely Disabled	X	X
Support - Neg Prtners of AIDS/HIV-Pos Adults	X	X
Support - Sig O's of Terminally-Ill Adults	X	
Adults (Mentally Ill)		
Socialization	X	X
Creative Expression	X	X
Medication Management	X	X
Self-Care	X	X
Gay and Lesbian Issues	X	X
Organizational Advisory Board	X	
Youth		
Coping with Disability	X	X
Creative Expression	X	
Crisis Int. - Sexually Abused Children		X
Literacy	X	
Parenting	X	X
Pregnancy Prevention	X	X
Recreational		X
School Drop-Out Prevention	X	X
Self-Esteem	X	X
Socialization	X	X
Volunteer Training	X	

Most of the groups were described by respondents as having open membership and meeting over extended periods of time, i.e., with no specific termination date. Only a few groups were described as either having fixed membership or as time limited.

Influence of Personal History on Attitude toward Work with Groups

Twelve of the 15 GWS were able to recall personal group membership at various ages and stages of their lives ranging from growing up in large families to attending summer camp - as campers, then counselors in training, then counselors, and some as administrators - to participating in school, church, and other clubs, dance groups, theater troupes, and other youth-activity organizations. According to these respondents, these experiences of personal membership greatly influenced their desire to work with groups as professionals. In fact, it might be said that these practitioners actively credit their positive attitudes and feelings about work with groups to long and diverse histories of successful "belonging." The remaining three GWS primarily credited positive leadership and membership experiences during social work school for their positive attitudes toward work with groups.

In contrast, only three NGWS credited extensive histories of personal group membership for their positive attitudes toward work with groups. Six NGWS credited the rewards of professional group leadership, while the remaining six NGWS credited satisfying personal group-therapy membership for their positive attitudes toward work with groups.

In sum, GWS appear to have had significantly earlier and more extensive personal membership experience in groups than have these particular NGWS. Whether or not such a difference is idiosyncratic to this sample, and further, whether or not it has any meaning is obviously open to question. Nonetheless, it is the nuances, no matter how trivial or vague, which lend character to a portrait, and with that in mind, this difference is noted.

GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARD WORK WITH GROUPS

Introduction

The goal of this area of inquiry is to formulate a picture of respondents' attitudes toward work with groups at the broadest level. How do they feel about developing new groups? What theoretical prescriptions guide their

practice? What issues/factors do they perceive as key in work with groups? What are their opinions about the small-group method as a medium for helping people? With which populations would they/might they not use the small-group method? What are their ideas about composition? Finally, what major differences emerge between subsamples at this early point of analysis?

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, examples from the interviews will be interspersed throughout the text to substantiate and highlight major points under discussion. Examples which take the form of direct quotation will be indicated by indented text. If examples from the two subsamples are interspersed, the text will be followed by "(GW)" or "(NGW)" to indicate which type of respondent is responsible for that particular example.

Orientation to Work with Groups

Fully 75% of the NGWS reported that they utilize *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* by the psychiatrist Irvin Yalom to guide their practice with groups. In contrast, 75% of the GWS reported that they refer to traditional social work literature such as *The Practice of Group Work* (Schwartz and Zalba), *The Skills of Helping Individual and Groups* (Shulman),

and Social Work With Groups (Northen) to guide their work with groups.

Worker Role

The role of the worker presents a major difference in perspective between GWS and NGWS. Approach to leadership by GWS is intensely member-centered, as evidenced by advice to the neophyte worker like:

> It's the members who are vital.
>
> Remember, you're one of several helpers.
>
> Members are allies; listen to them.
>
> Help formulate; don't micromanage.
>
> Don't think you need all the answers.
>
> Avoid taking all the responsibility.
>
> When in doubt, always ask the members for feedback.

Although NGWS also shared some member-centered words of advice related to group membership, their most typical advice was highly worker-centered, typified by words of advice like the following:

> Don't do a group unless you have lots of input into the content.
>
> Don't have too high expectations.
>
> Watch out for lack of movement.

Be introspective.

Be on top of the dynamics.

Do a group that interests you; don't do something you feel half-baked about because you can't fake the interest.

Try to make sure you're in the room, for better or for worse.

The admonition to not do a group unless the worker has meaningful input into what the group's content will be was common advice, along with the caution to stay alert, or "be on top of the dynamics."

NGWS are also somewhat more apprehensive about starting new groups than are GWS, as is evidenced by Table 5, which indicates the quality of their responses when asked about their initial reactions to the idea of forming new groups:

Table Five: Reactions to Starting New Groups (N=30)

Response	GWS	NGWS
elated	1	
thrilled	1	
excited	10	4
energized	1	
optimistic	1	
excited but nervous		2
anxious but excited		2
anxious		2
interested	1	2
ambivalent		1
scared		1
overwhelmed		1

Pre-Group Planning

Analysis indicates that pre-group planning - a process considered integral to work with groups (Kurland, 1978) if only indirectly related to mutual aid - holds a more central role in GWS' approach to practice with groups than it does in NGWS' approach. GWS urge extensive and comprehensive pre-group planning with advice like:

> Be real clear about the group's purpose when you meet potential members.
>
> Be sure to interview potential members.
>
> Always go to sessions prepared.
>
> Don't be vague about what the group's about when you interview potential members.

The only reference to pre-group planning was by one NGW, who advised the new worker to "be cautious in member selection."

Membership

NGWS tend to be more inclusive than GWS. While the NGWS would include virtually anyone in a group who has some capacity for insight, GWS would tend to limit

membership to those individuals who exhibit some capacity to relate to peers, as illustrated by the following typical (GW) statements:

> They should be able to relate to each other in a group context, even if just superficially at first...
>
> I think group could be used for any population except active psychotics in flagrant episode who can't relate to the others...
>
> Some diversity is good...because it rounds out the group allowing more interaction because it stimulates dialogue...
>
> Members should have the ability to relate in a group.

In contrast, NGWS made few references to members' capacity for interaction with their peers and tended instead to emphasize the individual's capacity for insight, as evidenced by such typical (NGW) statements as:

> Groups are good for all populations, although I'd have mixed feelings about, for example, putting someone in the last stages of Alzheimer's into a group.
>
> Group membership would really depend on level of contact with reality; it wouldn't be so good for the very psychotically unstable or internally chaotic, for example.
>
> Group members should basically have high verbal skills, capacity for insight, and not be too narcissistic.

> What would be important is that they have the same cognitive ability and insight.

Further, while GWS have a primarily need-centered approach to membership, NGWS have a primarily problem-centered perspective, as reflected in their statements regarding homogeneity and heterogeneity:

> It's good to have some similarity around need. (GW)
>
> Some homogeneity is important around needs. (GW)
>
> Members should have strong commonalities in problem areas. (NGW)
>
> You should have high homogeneity in need. (GW)
>
> What you need in a group is similarity of problems, period. You don't really need to pay attention to other types of similarities or differences. (NGW)
>
> Members should have some awareness of needs. (GW)
>
> The group members should have one thing in common, like, for example, setting, or commonality of problems. (NGW)
>
> If you have enough commonalities in need, then other factors...matter less. (GW)
>
> You wouldn't want too many similarities in pathology, or the same ego deficits wouldn't be good, either. (NGW)
>
> Commonality in need should be high. (GW)
>
> You wouldn't want, for example, a group of depressives, because there would be too much similarity around diagnosis. (NGW)

One NGW did refer to need with the following comment:

> I think a group is good for almost anyone... What would be important is that they have the same cognitive ability and insight, but totally different ideas and needs would be okay.

APPROACH TO PRACTICE

More specific content analysis of respondents' approaches to practice with groups begins here.

Control

The sample reflects a wide range of attitudes toward control. About one-quarter of the respondents expressed a desire to maintain a high degree of control, typified by such statements as:

> I tend to want to have the last word... (GW)
>
> I'm pretty high on control. (NGW)
>
> I have a high desire to control. (GW)
>
> I'm a fairly controlling person. (NGW)

At the other extreme, five respondents stated that they dislike assuming control and prefer to relinquish

control in their groups as much as possible, as evidenced by statements like:

> I don't like having much control. (GW)
>
> I don't like to exercise control at all. (NGW)

The remaining respondents expressed a tendency to assume or relinquish control contextually:

> It's always higher at the start, then I let go toward middles. (GW)
>
> Control is an issue around structure, like making sure all the members talk, but it's not an issue with content, for example, except to refocus, which I see as my primary task. (NGW)
>
> I only 'take over' when it feels like the group is on the brink of chaos. (GW)
>
> For one thing, it depends on how close I feel to the topic at hand. If I identify more, then I feel the need to control more; or if there's a high interest in some topic and everyone's talking at once, to reign them in. (NGW)
>
> I like to have more control in beginnings, and then I let go as time goes by. (GW)
>
> My job is to maintain safety and structure, but the degree to which I control depends on the level of functioning of the members. (NGW)
>
> I like to know what's going on, basically, and think about control in terms of stages, like what stage are we in, what's the next step... (GW)
>
> I feel pretty loose about control. I think I share it easily, and I'm most comfortable when I'm not being very controlling. (NGW)

Based solely on self-reports, a continuum reflecting range of desire to control from very high to very low would depict five NGWS and four GWS at the high-control end, seven NGWS and ten GWS somewhere in midrange (contextual control), and three NGWS and one GW at the low-control end.

Broadly speaking, therefore, the two subsamples are not incomparably dissimilar; i.e., the majorities still fall somewhere in midrange.

There is, nonetheless, a noteworthy finding with regard to this aspect of practice. There are some fairly obvious inconsistencies between what NGWS say about their use of control and actual behaviors, as reflected in case illustrations throughout the findings. On the whole, NGWS tend to be significantly more controlling in their groups than they assume.

Since the examples of NGWS' high tendency to control run throughout various findings - particularly findings related to roles and critical incidents - the reader is urged to keep the issue of control in mind while reading the remainder of this chapter.

Another finding with regard to control relates to context. GWS consistently utilize stage theory as a context for thinking about control, as evidenced by the above-noted and other related statements.

In contrast, with the exception of one NGW, there is a total lack of reference to stage of group development by NGWS. NGWS tend to use frames of reference other than stage theory in making decisions about maintaining or letting go of control, as illustrated in the following (NGW) statements:

> Once I've got members' attention, I almost don't encourage communication so that I can give them the information. One way I try to let go of control is to open up an area of discussion and let them run with it.
>
> I tend to control by switching the agenda if I think the members are straying. Otherwise, I try not to control too much.
>
> If the members interact in a way that goes against my expectations or values, I'll try to have the group address it or sometimes I'll move away to another area.
>
> I maintain control by trying not to have interruptions happen; my way of letting go is to get input from members when I wonder if I'm being over-controlling.
>
> Once, a member angered the others, and they attacked her. I told them I thought they were being very unhelpful. She wanted to leave, but I stood by the door to prevent her from leaving and told the group to find another way to tell her...
>
> Control makes things stilted, but I do try to keep people safe from physical or verbal attack. I try to let go of control by not preempting intense feelings or expressions when they disturb me.

In sum, not only are NGWS more generally controlling than their counterparts - a characteristic which will be

highlighted throughout the findings - but their decisions regarding control are typically made outside a framework of group-stage theory as well.

Case illustrations throughout these findings will also indicate that NGWS routinely assume a high level of responsibility for ensuring that members work toward individual goal achievement, for managing the nature and quality of process, and for managing the nature and quality of group process.

Leadership

Broadly speaking, the respondents tend to conceptualize their major roles in working with groups similarly as educational, facilitative, and structural. There are some clear and notable differences in the meaning that each subsample attaches to those roles, however, as will be made clear in the following presentation and throughout respondents' discussions of associated tasks.

The Educator

The GW Educator's tasks are intensely process oriented, whereas the NGW Educator's tasks are predominantly content oriented.

Essentially, the major task of the GW Educator is to teach members how to relate to one another in the group; and although this is sometimes done directly - by helping members set limits, for example, it is more frequently carried out indirectly by use of modeling.

According to the GWS, engaging in certain ways of expressing, of listening, of exposing vulnerability, of using humor, of asking other for help, of giving help, of commiserating, and of confronting are all tasks associated with the Educator. "Model" was the other label frequently used to connote the GW Educator.

The primary task of the NGW Educator is to teach members how to relate to the content of the group, i.e., how to learn. This NGW Educator is quite direct (much more so than its GW counterpart) in defining the work of the group and in helping that work get done.

The NGW Educator defines issues for the group to work on, actively offers interpretations of content, helps members return from tangents, and increases knowledge. In contrast to GWS, setting limits is not considered a task of the NGW Educator. Other labels used to refer to the NGW Educator were "interpreter" and "theme finder."

In sum, while the GW Educator attends primarily to how group members should be, the NGW Educator appears to attend primarily to what members should do.

The Facilitator

Although the major function of the Facilitator is to help establish connections, the object of connection differs for each subsample.

Like its educational companion, the GW Facilitator is also primarily process oriented. While the GW Educator is attending to nature of relationship, (what the relationships should be), however, the GW Facilitator is attending to helping members actualize those relationships with associated tasks like helping members clarify, stimulating interaction, helping members find commonality, and helping members explore difference.

GWS also used labels such as "connector," "enabler," "guide," "supporter," and "jumpstarter" to connote the GW Facilitator.

There is complementarity between the NGW Educator and NGW Facilitator as well, whose principal task is to facilitate members' connections with work. So while the NGW Educator is attending to nature of work (defines what the content should be), the NGW Facilitator attends to the quality of that work (helps members move beyond the superficial and learn from analogy).

Common tasks associated with the NGW Facilitator are stating expectations about quality and quantity of work,

helping members increase their capacity for insight, and suggesting issues for work.

NGWS also used labels like "stimulator," "air pumper" and "connector" to connote the NGW Facilitator - the last label referring primarily to the member-to-work connection.

To recapitulate, while both the GW Educator and GW Facilitator focus mainly on process (how the group should interact), the NGW Educator and NGW Facilitator focus primarily on content or task (what the group should do).

One might be left to wonder, of course, exactly which role attends to content in the GWS' groups and in the converse, which role attends to process in the NGWS' groups. As will be revealed below, group process is generally monitored by the NGW Provider of Structure in some detail, while GWS appear to leave management of content up to the members.

The Provider of Structure

GWS and NGWS conceptualize structure in different ways and not illogically, they conceptualize the tasks that are associated with providing structure differently as well.

The GW Provider of Structure creates a backdrop against which all other things happen, a broad context

within which the group operates. The primary function of this role is to "set boundaries against which members can react." Although a few ground rules may be set forth at the beginning of a new group, routine group activity is ruled and regulated by the members as the group develops. No other labels were used to connote the GW Provider of Structure.

The NGW Provider of Structure, on the other hand, is a fairly detail-oriented role. Tasks which not only frame and organize structure but which also regulate routine group activity - such as setting limits, noting when members have moved beyond those limits, helping members adhere to their contracts, helping members attend consistently, and intervening in conflict - are considered appropriate to this role.

"Traffic manager" and "general manager" were also used to connote this NGW role.

To recapitulate, while the GW Educator and GW Facilitator actively co-chair group meetings by giving extensive attention to setting norms and to helping relationships develop among the members, the GW Provider of Structure remains in the background. It is nevertheless regarded as a key role because it is the Provider of Structure who shapes the overall environment in which the group will live and develop. In contrast, a

"committee of three," i.e., NGW Educator, NGW Facilitator, and NGW Provider of Structure, co-chairs the group meetings of NGW practitioners. While the NGW Educator and NGW Facilitator help members achieve their goals, routine group affairs are monitored by the NGW Provider of Structure, who attends to nature and quality of process.

While GWS primarily guide - as evidenced by their extensive attention to the "how to's" of group living, NGWS primarily supervise - as evidenced by their extensive involvement in every dimension of group life.

Setting the Stage

Goals for the First Group Session

Although both sets of respondents expressed the cultivation of commitment and the creation of a safe environment as major goals for their first group sessions, what they actually do and say to achieve those goals are quite different.

All the respondents want group members to believe that membership will be a worthwhile investment. GWS, however, tend to focus on the member/member connection to achieve that goal, whereas NGWS appear to believe that it is clarity of structure and expectations which will effect that same goal.

As a consequence, while GWS devote the first group session primarily to helping members connect with one another by making positive statements about the group, by being inclusive, by reaching for and using commonalities of all types, and by helping members experience some immediate satisfaction, NGWS devote the first session primarily to articulating and clarifying expectations about work, i.e., how it is anticipated that the group experience will be able to help members achieve their goals.

A related difference is apparent with regard to creating a safe environment. Both sets of respondents wish to help the group environment be safe, but the ways in which they go about this task are substantially different.

GWS attempt to include all members in dialogue and to help members connect with what others say. Their stated assumption is that engaging all members in non-threatening dialogue not only eases anxiety but helps members begin to notice commonalities. According to these respondents, GWS go about creating a safe environment by using pre-group time for chit chat, by behaving in a friendly and genuine manner, by using humor, by using touch and other forms of nonverbal communication, by acknowledging mistakes, by acknowledging the newness of

the group, by using talk or activity to reach for ambivalence, by letting members know that not knowing is acceptable, by letting members know that knowing is equally acceptable, by discussing confidentiality, and finally, by attempting to set the norm of cooperation rather than competition.

According to the NGWS, they attempt to create a safe environment primarily by articulating and clarifying the worker's expectations of the members (i.e., regarding attendance, punctuality, confidentiality, and level of participation); they make statements about what the members can expect from the worker (e.g., help in connecting to individual goals, support for work, interpretation, protection against hostility); and they describe the expected rules and regulations of group life.

In sum, analysis indicates that generally speaking, respondents share a common mission for the first session - that of having their members want to return for the next meeting. More specifically, eliciting a sense of commitment and creating a safe environment are expressed as common goals. Without concrete examples of what practitioners say and do in their attempts to bring those goals about, however, those themes of difference would not be readily apparent. It is only through analysis of the nature of associated tasks that differences in approach

begin to emerge. GWS attempt to achieve both commitment and safety by the same set of tasks, i.e., by helping members identify what they have in common and by helping them relate to one another around those commonalities. On the other hand, articulating how participation will help group members achieve individual goals is the primary way in which NGWS try to gain their members' commitment; and clarifying structure (conceptualized as rules and regulations of conduct) is their principal way of creating safety.

Group Norms

Although most NGWS tended to confuse norms with rules, once the question was clarified, they expressed like their counterparts a major interest in helping a norm of respect develop in their groups. As in previous areas of analysis, however, differences became evident only upon analysis of what workers do and say to help norms come about.

Respect may appear to be a shared norm, but in fact, there is a distinct difference in the object which is intended to be the principal target of that respect.

GWS primarily express the desire to create a climate in which group members respect differences which will emerge among them. They go about creating such a climate

primarily by modeling ways of communicating, by explaining themselves (both in thought and action), by encouraging differences to emerge and be explored, by giving verbal credence to differences of opinion, and by being attentive listeners.

NGWS emphasize respect for content and primarily express the desire to create a climate in which group members will attack their work with respect. These respondents report going about creating a climate of respect by themselves demonstrating respect for the content of the group, by noting when disrespect for content occurs, by asking members to move beyond superficial expression, by mirroring back to the members what they say, by asking members to listen to one another without interruption, by asking the members to "use group as a time to really look at self and others," and by drawing attention to rules whenever they are broken.

In sum, although both sets of practitioners want to create an environment in which respect is the norm, the context in which they refer to that norm is different. While GWS tend to think about respect for difference, NGWS tend to think about respect for function.

Time and Worker Expectations

Expectations Of Members Over Time

Generally speaking, all practitioners expect the nature and level of commitment to increase with the passage of time. It is anticipated that group membership will take on increased meaning in members' lives over time, although GWS emphasized the expectation of far more frequently than did the NGWS.

What follows are some typical statements regarding expectations around commitment, beginning with some typical GW statements:

> I expect that members will become more vested in the group and the group's reason for being.
>
> I anticipate that members' respect for membership will increase with time and experience.
>
> I expect that commitment to the group will be reflected through an increasingly more pronounced work norm - in other words, through greater dedication to carrying out the work of the group.
>
> I expect that members will become more committed to the group and will participate more and more actively and contribute more.

On the other hand, NGWS far more frequently articulated expectations regarding the nature and level of skill -

that nature and level of skill would change over time, as is evidenced in a few examples of their (NGW) statements:

> I expect group members will become better listeners over time.
>
> I would hope they will be better able to problem-solve.
>
> I expect members to do more and do it more quickly.
>
> I expect them to engage in worthwhile learning.
>
> I expect that members will achieve greater insight. I expect that their learning process will be quicker and `stick better´ over time.

Also, GWS often voiced expectations regarding autonomy, much of it expressed in terms of the group, as reflected in their statements. Typically, GWS expect:

> members to enter the group as individuals and leave as a community;
>
> members to take more responsibility for what goes on in the group and how things get done;
>
> members to talk more like it´s `their´ group;
>
> the group to become more cohesive;
>
> the group to become more autonomous and that members will take over some of the leadership;
>
> the group will be less dependent on me to initiate things;
>
> members will express more ownership of the group; the group will take on a life of its own and roles will emerge, including leadership roles.

NGWS rarely mentioned group autonomy but did, however, frequently express major expectations in terms of the group members, both with regard to participation, as evidenced by such (NGW) statements as:

> I expect that members will lower their defenses over time and be less afraid to participate.
>
> I expect greater risk-taking, a loss of self-consciousness.
>
> I expect members to take more risks and be freer and more direct in their expression.
>
> I expect members to be more forthright with me, for example, be more intimate, more open, less afraid, and see that I'm supportive.

and with regard to personal growth, such as:

> I expect that talk will change from external events to internal processing, like talking about themselves.
>
> I expect that members will have grown as a person.
>
> I expect members to be better able to problem solve.
>
> I expect group members to move from the superficial to more in-depth with greater confidence.
>
> I expect greater insight and growth and for it to be quicker and `stick.'
>
> I expect that defenses will lower and that they'll (be) better listeners and that they will have transferred some in-group learning to the outside.

GWS also frequently articulated their expectations in a stage-specific context, such as:

> I expect the members to go through stages of group development and that participation will be based on those stages, in other words, that members will be more and more themselves and freer and spontaneous.
>
> I expect them to become more responsible for the process and be less dependent, except at the end.
>
> I expect that the process will be directly connected to stages of group development.
>
> I also expect that dialogue will be increasingly meaningful, especially through middles...

Only one NGW made a stage-specific reference to expectations, as follows:

> I expect stages to occur and expect members to get more done more quickly.

In sum, whereas GWS primarily direct their major expectations to the group, major expectations of NGWS center mainly on the individual.

Therefore, although at first glance expectations may not look inordinately different in the broadest sense, in-depth content analysis indicates that targets of expectation are different.

Expectations of Self Over Time

Generally, GWS' expectations are that with the passage of time, changes will occur in both quality and quantity of their participation in the group process. GWS' expectations of self over time are based on the same framework (i.e., stage theory) that they use for formulating their expectations of members; and the expectation to "give up some power and responsibility to the members" is a typical attitude, as is reflected in the following (GW) statements:

> I expect my responsibility to protect to decrease over time. I expect to pull back toward middles and become more active again at termination and also at significant first times.
>
> I expect to be more and more invisible and dispensable. Early on, I'll provide structure, but then later, in middles, I'll sit back, and at the end, I'll be more active again.
>
> I'll become less responsible for group process over time, especially in middles. Then, I'll become more responsible for pulling things together again toward termination.
>
> As members become more competent and assume some leadership roles and know what to do without me, I'll be able to sit back and be less active.
>
> I expect I'll be less demanding in beginnings...
>
> I have my antennas up in beginnings. I'm real active. As the group goes on and I feel more confident in the group to resolve issues, I lay back.

> I expect that I'll become less active except at termination, when I'll become more active again.
>
> I'll give up some control and work less and also take less responsibility for the agenda, for the content, and for the process, too.
>
> I'll take more of a back-seat and just monitor the process and leave the content to spring from them. In long-term open groups, you're always in middles, cause the group never really ends.

GWS also expect to become more personally revealing in the group over time, as evidenced by such (GW) statements as:

> I expect to allow more parts of my own personality to show and used purposefully.
>
> I'll let go of some of the control as the group develops and take more risks, too.
>
> I expect that I'll be more flexible with my own roles because as the group develops there will be more opportunities for all of us to take different roles.
>
> I expect to become more revealing and more playful too as we all get to know each other.

One GW stated her expectation of self in this way:

> I expect I'll be better at direct communication. It's so easy to 'wow' members in beginnings, because everyone is so nervous. At the fifth meeting, though, I'll have to work hard to relate, to communicate on a meaningful level.

Although there were only a few references regarding increased self-revelation and only one reference to stage theory by NGWS, several NGWS also expressed expectations about the change in nature and level of their participation with such (NGW) statements like:

> I'll expect more active use of self, with increasing ability to make assessment and to direct the process.
>
> I'll model less, and throw more questions back like 'What do you think?'
>
> I expect to be less verbal and less responsible for process and more open or self-revealing.
>
> I'll try to be quieter, although not when the group goes off the track or when there's a manipulative member or if hostility occurs.

On the other hand, several NGWS also responded with these expectations of self over time, as leaders in the group:

> My self confidence will decrease as I expect more from myself.
>
> I will grow as a professional and learn from my mistakes.
>
> I expect to maintain high standards of group work and apply them to any population.
>
> I will be less intimidated by working with a group.
>
> I'll feel less confused about members' growth... regression...growth...regression...

I expect that I'll be able to handle unusual situations better.

I'll become more confident about my role as leader, like not just one of the gang or too authoritarian.

I need to get more done as time passes - a sense of rushing and needing to control, to 'move' the process along, to reach the goal.

Critical Incidents

The "Difficult" Member

The case illustrations of friction resulting from a so-called difficult group member reflect a dramatic difference in approach between GWS and NGWS.

For every single GWS, the target of intervention is the group as a whole, evidenced by the extent to which they address themselves to the group in general with such (GW) primary remarks as:

What's happening here?

I don't think we're being very helpful.

All right, what's going on here?

Further, GWS expect the group as a whole to participate in the discussion which results from conflict, as illustrated by the following (GW) examples:

> I stopped everything and asked the group what was going on. At first, no one said much, but I waited. Then I asked again, and then they started to talk... I said something like 'There's something going on here that I think we all need to talk about.'
>
> One day I said to the group 'I don't think we're being very helpful here. Anyone have any idea what we're doing wrong?'

In contrast, NGWS routinely direct their primary remarks to the "disruptive" individual. For example:

> At first I ignored him, but when he insisted, I said 'Okay, well, no one can really help you with that right now. Could we continue?'
>
> I said to him: 'Your opinion is only one. Others too have good sense. Do you notice that others are not responding positively to you?' Others chimed in, and Gary left the room.

In fact, it is not uncommon for NGWS to take sides, as in the following (NGW) examples:

> I expressed the feeling that I didn't think Judy should be ousted - actually, I was worried because I didn't want the group to get smaller - and I met with her privately later about the whole thing.
>
> At one session they confronted Bernice about her airs... I allowed the confrontation, but she couldn't handle it. She became too anxious and left the group. The others learned to be less confrontational and more sensitive.
>
> One day the other members said they would leave if Ramona stayed. I reminded her to be more focused and not go off on ridiculous tangents.

> Greg said that sometimes he had hallucinations. Frank refused to believe him. He said Greg couldn't possibly with his diagnosis. They argued for some time and ended with some pretty angry words. I knew Frank was right, but I didn't say anything while they were arguing. Finally, I stopped them and told Greg that Frank was right and then asked if I should bring the DSM-III to the next meeting to prove it. The issue was dropped.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for NGWS to ask the so-called difficult member to leave the group altogether, as in the following (NGW) examples:

> Finally, one day I asked Frank to take time out or just sit quietly, at which point he became quite angry. I escorted him out of the room, warned him that his behavior was unacceptable, and referred him to his caseworker.
>
> Mel turned his chair away from the group, started to chew his gum very loudly, and continued to listen to music through his earphones. His lack of attention became contagious to some of the other members, who began to talk among themselves. I finally asked him to leave the group.

NGWS often used adjectives to describe "difficult" members and their behaviors which suggest that they often feel just as frustrated by these individuals who disturb the smooth process of the group. For instance, NGWS tend to describe "disruptive" individuals variously as:

> resistant to my interventions but needy of my attention

provocative, poor attender, condescending

(someone) who ticked everyone off including staff

loud, outrageous, and provocative

acting-out child who got out of hand

(someone) who hogged my attention

dictatorial...obnoxious

In contrast, GWS assigned such labels as "group monopolizer," "theoretician," "internal leader," "group bully," "editorializer," and "help-rejecting complainer" to these same types of group members.

Conflict and Confrontation

The manner in which conflict and confrontation are handled by the respondents continues to highlight differences between GWS′ and NGWS′ interventions in the case of friction.

A few very interrelated differences between the two subsamples are apparent regarding conflict among two or more group members. First is the extent to which conflict appears to be acceptable. Conflict of any kind is more easily tolerated by GWS than it is by NGWS. GWS do not try to preempt or stunt in any way the expression of conflict in their groups. In fact, they encourage its expression and exploration; and again, as with the

critical incident involving a so-called difficult member, it is the process surrounding the conflict which then becomes the work of the group, as is reflected in the following (GW) case examples:

> He charged toward the other member yelling: `I've had it with you.' I went over to him and put my arms around him - real tightly, and still bound, we sat down on two chairs next to each other. Still holding him, I said to the rest of the guys: `We need to get to the bottom of this...let's talk...'
>
> Their anger escalated quickly, and suddenly the long-time member picked up a chair, at which point the new member left the room. It had all happened so quickly that everyone, including me, was stunned. After a couple of seconds, I said: `What's happening here?' They said that it was `no big deal' of course and wanted to move on. I wouldn't let it go, though. I kept insisting that we talk about what had just happened. We did, but it was hard and slow for them - you know teens, they just wanted to let it go, but I didn't.
>
> After some time, the issue that was bothering them was revealed. The group became very involved and asked all sorts of questions. Eventually, they became real disapproving of what they found out. This all happened at the end of the meeting, though, so we couldn't really talk about any of it in depth. At the end of group, I said: `We have a conflict here in the group, and we can't just forget about it. We need to talk about it again next time...'

On the other hand - as in cases of "difficult" members, NGWS also regard conflict of this type as intrusive and inappropriate, an unwelcome interruption, as is reflected in these (NGW) case examples:

> The girls were really mad at each other, and it looked like one might actually go after the other one, so I asked them to stop their behavior right away. I set up a kangaroo court to avoid a fight. Each of the girls told their story to the others who were the jury, and I was the judge. After we heard them, the 'members of the jury' told them there was no reason to fight and what they should do from that point on.
>
> One of (the subgroups) liked her (the respondent's colleague) very much, while the other one hated her, and they were always arguing about it. At one session, one of the more vocal members began to talk real loudly and passionately about why he hated her I decided that the argument was pretty threatening to the quieter members, so I asked everyone to be quiet and listen to me talk about extremes of opinion - you know, splitting, and why they happen and what intrapsychic needs they serve.

While GWS routinely and actively encourage members to elaborate, clarify, and in other ways extend the expression of difference, as is reflected in the following (GW) example,

> The argument escalated to a point at which the challenger shouted something like: 'Who died and left you boss?!' They shouted a little more, while the others were pretty cowed. Finally, when a stalemate became clear, I said: 'Let's slow down...what's really going on?' The two started to argue again, so I turned to the others and asked: 'Where is everybody, anyway?' They claimed they didn't really care, so I said to everyone: 'There's a lot more to this than meets the eye, I think. This isn't in any way resolved' and continued to try to get them to talk. We spent the whole hour at it...

NGWS actively tend to discourage members from engaging in

and exploring the full impact and meaning of difference, as reflected in this (NGW) example:

> She was pretty routinely scapegoated by the others and knew how to push all our buttons. One time she became particularly angry about something another member had done outside the group. I felt pretty angry with her, and I didn't feel comfortable about letting the conflict evolve, so in the interest of providing balance, I asked them to meet me in private after the meeting.

Also, as may be noted in their case examples throughout this section, GWS consistently direct their interventions to the group as a whole and attempt to involve other group members in dialogue. In contrast, NGWS' interventions are routinely targeted to the individuals who are overtly engaged in conflict, like in the following (NGW) example:

> One day he got really angry at another member who had offended him just before we started. I tried to get them to talk, but Jay just displaced his anger on me. So I told him: 'Okay, if you're angry, you don't have to stay; we can talk about it later.' He did stay, but he was silent for the rest of the meeting, and then we talked about it after.

<u>Decision Making</u>

Every GW case illustration reflects a process of decision-making by consensus, while although some NGW

examples were of decision by consensus, NGWS appear to prefer decision-making by vote. Two examples of each type of method follow:

> What to do over my pregnancy leave was discussed over weeks and weeks. Finally, they all decided (by consensus) to put themselves `on hold´ for six months till my return. (GW)
>
> Judy wanted entry just before the production, and the others were very worried about her performance. They talked about it and finally agreed that she could come back in for the improvs but not for the choreographed pieces... (GW)
>
> The issue was to end or continue over the summer without a leader. They talked about it and then put it to a vote. (NGW)
>
> They had to plan the last session, what kind of an activity to do, so they talked about the possibilities and then they voted. (NGW)

Further, there is some tendency by NGWS to predetermine options, a tendency not apparently correlated with group purpose or characteristics of membership, as highlighted by these (NGW) examples:

> We´d decided (respondent and co-leader) that there would be no eating in the group, but John used to eat anyway. One day he was absent, and Jim brought up the fact that John always eats even though he´s not supposed to. We agreed to talk about it, and we repeated why we didn´t think eating was a good idea, because food is used as a safety net to hold in expression, and it´s disruptive too. Jim then suggested that maybe it would be ok to drink during a 10-minute grace period at the beginning of group. We thought that would be okay.

> The group had gone down to four members, which we (respondent and co-leader) thought was too small, so we asked the group if they wanted to take new members or terminate. They decided to terminate.
>
> I thought we should have some kind of activity to deal with this subject, because it's such a touchy subject, so I asked them to vote on which movie they'd like to see next week so we could move along quickly to our agenda.

Premature Termination

Premature termination of a group member is regarded by these GWS as a group rather than individual issue - a perspective which holds true regardless of actual final outcome. Their position is evidenced by such behaviors as placing the group on "group alert" when members are absent and urging dissatisfied individuals to share their feelings with the other members "en groupe."

Further, even if unsuccessful in helping a member return to or reintegrate into the group, GWS routinely initiate a group discussion to talk about not only what precipitated the member's decision but to explore the implications of leaving abruptly as well - both for the individual and for those left behind, as reflected in the following (GW) examples:

> Adam was the youngest and often annoyed the others with his need for special attention. After a session in which he had been particularly provoked by another member, he missed a session. I placed the rest of

the group on `group alert' - to look for him, talk with him, to find out what was going on. I also called him and we met the next day. I encouraged Adam to talk to the group but he was really reluctant. Finally, I said: `But what about the group contract? Do you remember, we all agreed that we'd talk things over if we were upset?' He said yes, he remembered, so I gave him three options: one was to return and talk to the group on his own; the second was to return and I'd help him talk to the group; and the third was that if he didn't return, I'd talk to the group about it anyway. I think that when he realized I'd talk about him even if he wasn't there, he decided to come back and we'd talk to the group together.

After three months of being a regular attender, John was absent. When I asked: `Where's John?" the others said they had seen him in school but that he hadn't said anything about missing group. I asked the group to keep their eyes open for him and ask him why he missed. Over the next several days I called his mother and finally got her. She told me that she didn't think John needed any more services and wouldn't be returning to the center anymore. I couldn't get it clear about who had made that decision, so I wrote to John several times but he never answered. He never talked to the others in school, either. Finally, we decided to write a letter from the group letting him know that we missed him.

Emily was definitely an outsider in this group because she didn't belong to the school group that everyone else was in. I tried to get the group to talk about the fact that they were always excluding her, but it never worked, and everybody was really unhappy. One day, Emily came in with her mother and told me that she didn't want to be in the group anymore. I could really understand her, and in fact, I thought it would be better all the way around if she wasn't in this particular group, too. So, at the next group meeting, we all talked a long time about the situation for a long time, and basically, I helped them all say goodbye to each other.

Mary didn't return to group after having argued the last week with Rhoda. Rhoda was recognized by everybody else as the leader, and Mary was considered

> the 'challenger.' When I saw Mary in the hallway the next day I asked her to come back to the group to talk about what was **really** going on between her and Rhoda, but she wouldn't. At our next group, I told them that Mary wasn't coming back and asked them to share their reactions. Mostly they expressed mixed feelings, like regret that a member had left but relief that there wouldn't be anymore group conflict. When I questioned that expectation as being really realistic (knowing how aggressive Rhoda could be - who was still there), the group began to scapegoat Mary as the troublemaker. After a few minutes, I called them on it, and Rhoda admitted that well, she knew she could be bossy sometimes...and then the talk became more real.

NGWS routinely reach out to individuals who decide to leave the group as well. They are, however, much less likely to urge those individuals to return to the group - either to express their feelings or to terminate from the group formally.

Examples of NGW critical incidents were often the basis for their case examples of premature termination.

NGWS are apt to request a private meeting with the individual to discuss his or her concerns. And on the whole, NGWS are also less likely to initiate a dialogue in the group about why an individual has left and the implications of premature termination. They may, in fact, advise the rest of the members that a certain individual will no longer be participating, but there appears to be little inclination to explore the meaning of

that manner of departure with the rest of the members, as illustrated by the following (NGW) examples:

> The group resumed after Christmas break, and Gary, who had been a member for a year and a half came to group quite disturbed. His attendance became very sporadic, and finally, he didn't return at all. I called him and asked to choose - either to be in the group or be out of it completely. He said he didn't want to be in group anymore.

> Jane, a new member, began to provoke others by suggesting that unlike them, she was in the group by mistake. Well, after a few sessions of that the rest of the members confronted her about it. I asked the group if it was acceptable to them that she (Jane) remain in the group if she harbored those feelings. They reluctantly agreed, but Jane dropped out after two more sessions. I reached out to her, but she stayed in individual counseling. (no evidence of later in-group discussion)

> Betty just couldn't sit still in group and participate appropriate. One day, one of the other members finally challenged her about it. I told Betty that if she was going to continue behaving in such a hyperactive way, she shouldn't return to the next group. She continued all the same for the rest of the session. When one of the other members noticed at the next session that Betty was absent, the others said `Good!' (no references to outreach)

> Mona had come to group every single week for about two years. In fact, she was at the center practically every day. Once, she went to Florida for a short period of time -- and missed a few sessions. After a month of absence, I got a call from (Mrs. X) at (another agency). She told me that Mona had been there and didn't want to come back to the center anymore and she wondered why. I told her I didn't know, except that I knew Mona had been angry for quite some time about (cafeteria regulations). I called Mona, who made up all sorts of excuses, but I

> know why she was really angry. I think she just didn't want to admit it. So at the next group meeting, I told the rest of the group that Mona wouldn't be coming back and I also told them why I thought she wouldn't come back to group.

In sum, NGWS seem to conceptualize premature termination as a relatively private issue. Neither is a dissatisfied member routinely urged to return to the group to discuss his or her feelings, nor are the remaining members encouraged to discuss the meaning and implications of abrupt termination.

Evaluation

GWS and NGWS tend to emphasize different processes in evaluating the success of their groups.

GWS routinely involve members in some form of dialogue, usually at or toward termination, in addition to carrying out some form of independent professional assessment.

What follows are a few examples of typical responses to the question about how GWS evaluated the success of their latest (GW) groups:

> I looked at attendance, I thought about whether or not the group had reached its purpose - both group and individual - and I asked the members.

> I checked with members along the way and listened for reminiscences of positive experiences. In fact, I'm more involved in ongoing process than just at termination.
>
> We talked about it during the last couple of sessions. I also reflected myself and assessed the kind of content the group had covered.
>
> I asked the members to evaluate it...
>
> We did a `group recall' and then later my co-leader and I processed the group.
>
> I got some feedback from the members at the end and after it was over I reflected on purpose and assessed what the group had achieved, and if the purpose had changed at all.
>
> Over the weeks I would check for losses, participation, whether or not members were helping each other. The group assessed how it was doing at the end of each meeting and then at termination.

Although some NGWS include member feedback in their evaluations, as suggested by the following (NGW) responses,

> I asked the members constantly and then discussed it with my supervisor.
>
> I gave the group a questionnaire to fill out. We also talked about what they'd change if they could, and I observed them at the last session.
>
> I talked with the members in our last session.

they are just as likely to evaluate the success of their groups without input from members as they are to include

member feedback, as suggested by the following (NGW) examples:

> I checked attendance, involvement, and how much each member had grown...
>
> I looked at the extent to which members achieved personal goals and whether there was any movement toward better quality of life - and I also assessed members in individual counseling (as relates to growth from the group experience). I also discussed each of the members with their team members (staff, other involved professionals).
>
> My co-leader and I processed it on an ongoing basis, after each group.
>
> I used my intuition about how it went and got some feedback from each of the members both in group and in private.

Further, GWS evaluate both the individual in the group and system issues, as reflected by the following (GW) examples:

> I got feedback from the members in group. We reviewed their goals and expectations and if the group had been enjoyable for them. (I also make a) personal assessment about whether they met their goals and if something meaningful has come out of the whole experience.
>
> I just observed, basically, whether or not goals were being met, both group and individual goals, and we also evaluated the experience in group. I also review the group norms that have been established.

NGWS tend to focus their evaluation primarily on individual progress, such as extent to which individual objectives have been met, whether or not desirable change has been effected, and degree to which self awareness has increased, as reflected in these (NGW) examples:

> I asked the nurses to evaluate the members' behavior changes at the end of group.
>
> I looked at whether or not members' goals and objectives were achieved.
>
> I observed people's expressions during and after each session - if members had found a healthy relationship with one other person or felt better about or more aware of themselves and less fearful of making whatever change they wanted to make.

Definitions of Mutual Aid

A comparison of definitions of mutual aid suggests that while there may be room for confrontation in GWS' conceptualization of mutual aid, as suggested by these (GW) definitions:

> Mutual aid is an active give and take toward understanding and helping another person in a respectful and honest way.
>
> Mutual aid is members' working through of issues in regard to the purpose of the group.

> Mutual aid happens through members' examples or participation - that another member or members can feel the support from that example and apply it or try out new ways of thinking.
>
> Mutual aid is genuine listening and honest response.

there is a greater emphasis on identification (i.e., support/sympathy) in NGWS' definitions of the mutual-aid process, as suggested by (NGW) definitions such as these:

> Mutual aid is support.
>
> Mutual aid is helping each other.
>
> Mutual aid is being able to share and lend support to each other.
>
> Mutual aid is where one person is helpful to another in giving greater understanding into feelings and behaviors and the other can do the same and each can accept from the other.

NGWS' definitions of mutual aid also focus heavily on mutual aid as personal-growth related phenomenon, as reflected by such (NGW) definitions as:

> Mutual aid is people helping each other to move toward achieving the goals that they want in their life.
>
> Mutual aid is where one person is helpful to another in giving greater understanding into feelings and behaviors and the other can do the same and each can accept from the other.

> Mutual aid is when a group environment permits people to learn and self reflect based on their hearing other people's shared feelings, experiences, and solutions.
>
> Mutual aid is the ability of people to identify something in themselves that is shown in another person and use themselves to help the other person access that themselves.
>
> Mutual aid is people helping each other to move toward achieving the goals that they want in their life.

in contrast to GWS' definitions, which suggest that mutual aid is perceived as a phenomenon related both to individual growth/satisfaction and to the group-as-system:

> Mutual aid is being heard and hearing others.
>
> Mutual aid is support of one another when the group works toward some common goal.
>
> Mutual aid is when members become so attached that they can be there for another.
>
> Mutual aid is support for growth - for both members when one helps another.
>
> Mutual aid is people working together in such a way as to promote individual growth and a team spirit.
>
> Mutual aid is when the person expressing him or herself feels the group's support and the members feel that they are in fact being supportive.

FINDINGS HIGHLIGHTED

Introduction

A few very interrelated themes dominate the differences which exist between GWS and NGWS. They are presented herein as discrete categories, although in reality they are inextricably interrelated, they are often duplicative, they tend to symbolize nuance rather than absolute, and each is capable of substantially influencing the nature of the other by slight realignment.

Clearly, this material could be presented in any number of frameworks. Nonetheless, the following five major themes of difference were made apparent to the researcher.

Conceptualizing the Group

Difference in overall conceptualization of the raison d'etre of group membership represents the most significant finding of this study; and the remaining four areas of difference may be variously said to flow from, exist as a result of, or express in various ways this main difference.

NGWS' conceptualization of the group is primarily problem-centered, while GWS' conceptualization is need-centered - a difference not correlated with differences in types of groups or settings.

NGWS tend to refer to the problems which bring individuals to membership and on which group members will need to "work," while GWS refer to needs which bring people to group and which can be "met," or "satisfied" by a group-membership experience. GWS expect the group members to integrally affect and effect the shape and movement of the group experience -- a perspective which is evidenced by the extent to which their goals are process-oriented and by the extent to which their interventions and expectations are directed to the group as a whole. NGWS conceptualize the group primarily as a place for individual change in a supportive environment -- a perspective which is evidenced by the extent to which these respondents' goals are work-oriented and the extent to which their interventions and expectations are directed to the individual in the group.

NGWS are highly inclusive in their consideration of individuals for group membership, and they utilize the individual's capacity for insight as criterion for membership. GWS are less inclusive and are only willing

to accept individuals in their groups who will be able to relate at least in some measure to the other group members.

Further, while GWS primarily devote their energy to developing and fostering member/member connections, as evidenced by many of their actions from the pre-group planning stage to termination, NGWS devote their energies primarily to developing and enhancing the member/work connection, as evidenced by their predominant activities.

Over time, GWS attempt to move themselves out of the central position of authority in which they begin - in essence, to "work themselves out of a job." NGWS assume and maintain centralized authority in their groups and maintain it or share it with their group members according to contexts other than stage theory.

FInally, while GWS frequently refer to the concept of a "group purpose," NGWS are more likely to refer to the "individual goals" on which membership is expected to focus.

Reaction to Conflict

As is evidenced by their case illustrations, NGWS tend to regard conflict as an intrusion into the group's

affairs, whether it arises from the adoption of a negative role by a group member or stems from some overt conflict between or among members. Conflict is viewed as an event extraordinary to the group process, an unwelcome interruption which must be resolved before the group can "move on." It must be quelled so that the ordinary, expected work of the group may continue. Further, there is some tendency on the part of NGWS to take sides - that is, to side with one or the other party involved in conflict - whatever shape the conflict takes. In short, NGWS perceive conflict as a threat to the group.

GWS expect conflict to occur as a natural result of group life. They do not routinely attempt to put it to an end before it has had potential for articulation, airing, and exploration. In fact, in discussing group norms, GWS primarily think about and refer to the norm of respect in terms of respect for difference. In contrast, NGWS think about and refer to the norm of respect mainly in the context of function, i.e., respect for work toward achieving individual goals. NGWS do not generally regard conflict as one of the processes which will help the small group actualize purpose in contrast to GWS, who perceive conflict as a normal consequence of group life - a group issue.

Exercise of Control

Control represents another major theme of difference between the two subsamples, a theme which recurs throughout the findings.

In general, NGWS tend to assume greater control of what goes on in their groups than do GWS, as evidenced by the detail with which the NGWS attend to all dimensions of group life. While GWS generally leave content-related decisions up to the membership, NGWS leave no area of control up to members.

Aside from generally assuming control over routine process and content, NGWS maintain tight control over the extent to which conflict and its expression will be tolerated in the group, the nature and course of it related dialogue, and its outcome. Furthermore, that voting is the predominant method of decision-making around important issues in their groups also illustrates that control and order is an important aspect of the group. Moreover, while GWS' decisions about control are routinely based on stage theory, only one NGW referred to stage theory as the framework for making decisions about control.

Leadership

Another significant difference between these two subsamples regards the way in which they conceptualize leadership. Not only do NGWS theoretically conceptualize group practice as a method in which the worker is the central character - the "arch-helper" - they do in fact tend to adopt and maintain that center position in group affairs at all times. Otherwise said, NGWS are notably more worker-centered in their approach to practice than are GWS, as evidenced by the extent to which NGWS adopt a central role in all aspects of the group's routine process and function.

This position of centrality in the group is considerably different from the member-centered approach of the GWS, who, although they may begin as the center of the group by design, consistently attempt to move out of that position - to "work their way out" of that particular spot. In fact, GWS expect that fairly quickly, members will begin to try out any number of roles which, alone or in combination, will displace the worker as the group's centerpost.

Further, even though NGWS expect the passage of time to influence group members in a variety of ways, they do

not realize as readily or fully the implications of time on their own parallel leadership process. They have ideas about how members should change over time, and they have opinions about what changes should be occurring in the group generally as time goes by, but they appear to have much less understanding of how their "use of self" should change according to that same passage of time. GWS, on the other hand, have clear ideas about how members should change over time, what kinds of changes should be occurring over time, and how their participation in the group should change over time; and in discussing their expectations of both members and of self, they refer to stage theory as a guide for those expectations. Finally, GWS group leaders devote a great deal of energy in helping group members connect to one another, as suggested by their emphasis on process-related goals. In contrast, NGWS group leaders devote a great deal of their energies into helping members connect to their tasks, as suggested by the extent to which they emphasize work-related goals.

Target of Intervention

GWS favor group-level interventions, while NGWS favor individual-level interventions. Neither target is favored by either subsample to the total exclusion of the

other, but each subsample has a marked tendency. Whereas GWS emphasize one level, NGWS emphasize the other; and it is this contrast in emphasis which suggests a major theme of difference between them.

The ways in which respondents approach conflict, for example, clearly illustrate this difference. While GWS conceptualize their task primarily as calling the group "into action," so to speak, whenever something occurs in the group or whenever something has occurred outside the group which affects one or more members and which one member brings into the group, NGWS appear to conceptualize their task as intervening at the individual level, such as looking to the parties overtly-involved in conflict for resolution. In other words, it is the "initiators" or "identified patient" parties which are called upon for action or reaction in NGW groups. Sometimes the party or parties are asked to stop. Sometimes the "disruptive" individual is asked to leave the room. Sometimes the parties are asked to "set the conflict aside" until the session's end, at which time it is addressed in private, and sometimes individuals are asked to leave the group altogether. No matter the exact scenario, the ways in which NGWS handle conflict in their groups reflects their tendency to perceive it as an individual symptom in need of individual redress.

Instances of premature termination also reflect quite clearly NGWS' tendencies to intervene at the individual level. While GWS consistently include the entire group in addressing the issue of a missing member, NGWS do not necessarily intervene in a like manner.

All respondents express dismay and concern when a member leaves the group prematurely, but the rule of thumb for GWS is to involve the other members in the process of discovery and resolution, while the rule of thumb for the NGWS is to undertake that process alone, again indicating that basically, membership - whether at the introductory level (as reflected by their criterion of capacity for insight for inclusion) or at the termination level (as reflected by the extent to which they reach out to members on their own) - is an individual issue and requires individual intervention.

"Mutual Aid in the Mediaeval City"

> (M)utual aid and support are such inherent parts of human nature that at no time of history can we discover men living in small isolated families fighting each other for the means of subsistence. On the contrary, modern research...proves that since the very beginning...men used to agglomerate...by an idea of common descent and by worship of common ancestors. For thousands and thousands of years this organization has kept men together, even though there was no authority whatever to impose it. It has deeply impressed all subsequent development of mankind; and (when) the...separated family within the clan itself had destroyed the old unity of the clan, a new form of union...was called into existence by the social genius of man...
>
> (The) guild...was much more than an eating association, or...an association for going to church...or a burial club. It answered to a deeply inrooted want of human nature... It was an association for mutual support in all circumstances...
>
> In short...we see that (the guild) was...an attempt at organizing, on a much grander scale...a close union for mutual aid and support...without imposing upon men the fetters of the State...
>
> (This) era may thus be described as an immense attempt at securing mutual aid and support on a grand scale... through all manifestations of human life and to all possible degrees... It united men formerly divided... secured them a very great deal of freedom, and ten-folded their forces. (Cities) succumbed in the long run before powerful enemies; not having understood the mutual-aid principle widely enough, they themselves committed fatal faults; but they did not perish through their own jealousies, and their errors were not a want of federation spirit among themselves.[1]

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[1] Petr Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution, London: William Heinemann, 1908, pp. 153-209.

CHAPTER FIVE

EXPERT REFLECTION

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

The major findings of this study were presented to a panel of senior social work scholars at the Annual Symposium on Social Work with Groups in October, 1991, for their review, reaction, and commentary.

Panelists were asked to comment on major findings of this study, to discuss their reactions to the findings - such as the extent to which findings particularly surprised them or confirmed what they would have anticipated - and also to note any factors which they might believe would influence the nature of workers' approaches and which could provide a basis for further investigation.

A roster of individuals who participated in this 90-minute round-table is attached as Appendix D; and the letter of request is attached as Appendix E.

Reflections are presented in group-discussion form and quotations, when lengthy, are indicated by indented and single-spaced text.

A RATIONALE FOR EXPERT REFLECTION

Exploration is most rewarding if there is the opportunity to examine and question the area of interest from as many perspectives as feasible. Therefore, the findings generated from interviews with respondents -- who in this case represent both expert (about their own approaches) and case studies, (i.e, actual units of analysis) -- were shared with a panel of individuals recognized as senior social work scholars, theoreticians, and practitioners; and their feedback is included here.

The first section entitled "Reflections" presents in condensed form panelists' reactions to and observations about the findings and discussion of what they perceived as major points.

The next section entitled "Closing Comments" presents the various ways in which the panelists envision the present and future utility of this study, as well as their suggestions for further research.

REFLECTIONS

Control

That GWS and NGWS refer to the so-called "difficult" group members with such different terminology indicated to the panelists that control was an immediately-apparent theme of difference, and some surprise was expressed at the extent to which NGWS' labels were pejorative.

It was suggested that the worker who is trained and knows that good can, even will, come from conflict, is less likely to label so extremely. The worker who is less sure about the possible merits of conflict, on the other hand, is likely to be "scared off" and to label in such a way that s/he may maintain a feeling of control.

One panelist noted that a recent survey of social workers (unpublished) also indicates that like these NGWS, conflict generally tends to be handled outside the group as an individual issue rather than in the group as a system issue, -- but there was no evidence in that study of such "strongly rejecting" labels.

In general, however, panelists were not surprised that workers who have been trained to "share the wealth"

of power with group members and have "faith" in the group members to assume leadership over both process and content are apt to be less controlling than workers who have not been trained in "working themselves out of a job."

Conflict

The discussion of conflict as related to control led the panel to review other findings related to conflict, and the general differences between trained and untrained workers in dealing with conflict in a group were also noted as striking.

Some discussion revolved around society's negative perception of conflict generally, i.e., how the basic position in this culture is to fear conflict and its welcome is viewed almost as "abnormal;" how this broad social view of conflict undoubtedly affects a worker's response; and how socialization is a potentially powerful variable in a worker's approach to dealing with conflict in a group.

Gender, agency setting, and even type of work supervisor were also articulated as possible variables in how workers deal with conflict.

With regard to supervision, for example, it was suggested that a worker whose supervisor had been trained

in social work with groups would be apt to get support for tolerating and exploring conflict when it occurs.

With regard to gender, the extent to which women might tend to be avoiding of conflict because of their general vulnerability in an increasingly-threatening society was considered as another possible factor in determining ways in which workers handle conflict.

Most of the discussion, however, centered on the fact that unless otherwise taught, conflict is a frightening phenomenon for most people and that an intellectual understanding of conflict's possible "utility" is not sufficient to help workers deal with it when it occurs in the group.

It was proposed that the major issue with regard to conflict is the opportunity for intense study and practice - that there is a great distance between "hearing the 'right' or 'ideal' way of doing about things in a group" and "having the opportunity to experience what's being taught."

That use of difference in a group must be learned and that this learning process is a long and demanding one were opinions repeatedly voiced throughout this discussion. If the worker is frightened of conflict, noted one panelist, then reaction takes precedence over response,

> but if a student (or worker) has enough opportunity to work with a group under supervision and begins to **really trust the members to** handle things - which signifies that the worker knows that members can help one another with whatever happens in the group - both in terms of process and of content - then **if that worker has that basic trust**, if the worker has really integrated that perspective, then it dramatically changes the whole picture of who's the helper.

Nonetheless, some disappointment was expressed at the extent to which the concept that "everything is grist for the mill" was apparently not routinely integrated by all social workers - regardless of training.

The nature of workers' visions for the outcome of group conflict was also questioned, and it was agreed that vision, or "intent" would certainly influence behavior.

Intent

It was proposed that the issue of stage-setting is less one of actual ways in which workers go about the process than their intentions, i.e., what they wish to accomplish by what they do. Participants were not surprised at GWS' tendency to emphasize process-oriented goals while NGWS emphasize function-oriented goals.

Although creating a safe environment is a common desire, for example, it was proposed that function goals

might represent NGWS' way of creating a safe environment for the worker; while GWS, who feel less need to control, can relax and pay more attention to creating a safe environment for the members because they have greater trust that the group can "keep it together:"

> Perhaps for the GWS, who are trained and feel whatever happens will happen and feel able and ready to handle it, whatever it is, they're ready to make the group safe for the members, so their energies go toward connecting the members to one another; i.e., they're really concerned with that particular aspect of the group experience; whereas in light of the fact that one of the primary intents of the NGWS was, or is, to create rules and make sure all the members know the rules and expectations, it may be that they're trying, basically, to make it safe for the worker...

"In other words," elaborated another panelist, "rules are basically more for the benefit of those who set them."

In response to the proposition that rules and regulations may be created largely to help the worker, one member of the panel suggested that their articulation not be selected as specific representation of a worker's "self-centeredness." This comment was countered by another panelist, who suggested that it is not their articulation, per se, which indicates the difference in worker perspective, but that the difference in emphasis highlights the way in which trained group workers have learned to think about rules and norms. In other words,

> we (trained group workers) know it takes time, we don't rush to have all done in the first meeting because we know that many aspects of group life will continue to be an issue over time, that things will get done and redone...

Structure of group and type of group or group purpose were considered to be important variables with regard to intent or prioritization of early goals. The extent to which such classification is difficult was recognized as a legitimate obstacle, however - and very acutely confirmed as well by a recent study which, according to one panelist, elicited over 230 labels of "types of groups," most of which referred to group content rather than purpose!

Nonetheless, intent was perceived as key to the issue of stage-setting in general, and it was suggested that differences in stage-setting may also result from a difference in models, i.e., different "ideal ways of doing things." For example, with their heavy emphasis on function-oriented goals, NGWS may be (consciously or not) following a psycho-educational model of leadership, which would, in fact, mandate that content be conceptualized as the foundation from which discussion would evolve.

Leadership

Based on the presentation of findings related to worker roles and associated tasks, it was proposed that GWS primarily conceptualize themselves as "socializers,"

> whose task is to help members learn how to learn, how to go about learning, rather than the untrained workers, who may be more interested simply in teaching something...that is, making sure members learn (whatever)...as opposed to the trained group worker whose idea is that it is more important to help people **know how** to learn than to learn `x' content...

It was also suggested that using categories of leadership roles developed by a number of contemporary theoreticians might provide a useful conceptual framework for organizing this material and assessing its implications.

Expectations

Expectations of Members Over Time

In response to the findings regarding workers' expectations of members over time, a lengthy discussion developed about the extent to which GWS described their

major expectations in terms of the group system while NGWS described their major expectations in terms of individuals in the group.

A question was raised as to whether or not GWS also voiced major expectations of individuals in the group, such as the expectation for increased individual as well as group autonomy - the assumption being that there would be a mutuality between expectations of the group _and_ of the individual by workers trained to conceptualize the group system as one client and individual-in-group as the other client, while there would be a tendency to focus on the individual by an untrained worker. Some examples of GWS' expectations were reviewed, revealing that even GWS' major expectations of individuals in the group are, as a rule, conceptualized as group phenomena (thus inferring even if not making explicit the individual role in that expectation).

While some discussants were not concerned about the implicit reference to the individual in GWS' statements of major expectations, others were concerned that there was not more explicit reference to the "linkage" between group and individual.

After some further exploration of this issue and a search for possible alternative interpretations of

respondents' major expectations, it was proposed that perhaps trained workers, who are used to being concerned with the concept of "group," would most likely be in that "mind set" when thinking about their practice - that the group itself would probably be the frame of reference, while untrained workers might be more likely to use the individual as their frame of reference.

It was also noted that group development is much less "accessed" by workers not familiar with that concept, so while trained workers might reflexively frame their expectations based on stages of group development, workers who had not been trained specifically to carry out actions based upon a stage-theory framework would again use the individual as their frame of reference. In other words, suggested this panelist, vocabulary might suggest greater qualitative differences than actually exist in this area.

Nonetheless, in spite of possible explanations such as those noted above, it was agreed by all that these differences highlight very particularly the extent to which generalist education can result in the loss of some "important stuff that's peculiar" to social work with groups.

Panelists then suggested that type of group, purpose of group, and structure of group are factors which could

influence workers in this area of practice and that the relationship between or among these variables and worker expectations of members should be further explored.

Expectations of Self Over Time

Finally, several examples of how GWS and NGWS anticipate time to influence their expectations of self were shared with the panelists, who were impressed by the clear qualitative differences between the subsamples.

That many of the NGWS understood this question as one of personal development rather than one of practice, and that of those who did interpret the question correctly, none used group-development theory to frame their expectations, were two findings which the panelists agreed demonstrate obvious and significant differences in approach to practice.

One panelist remarked that his recent survey of social workers had yielded similar results in this area of practice. Many respondents had also misinterpreted a similar question to be one of personal development rather than one of practice as well. This similarity in findings substantiates that the differences between these GWS and NGWS are not merely idiosyncratic to this sample but that

there may be many social workers who work with groups without having fully integrated group stage theory into their approach to practice.

Closing Comments

An observation was made that even more specific information about the particular groups with which the respondents work (such as type, purpose, structure, etc.) which would be useful for further assessing the extent to which these findings may be related to variables other than training.

For example, if studies similar to this one could be replicated with social workers who are working with constituencies closely similar in characteristic but which participate in different types of groups, such studies could add substantial confirmation of the implications which have been raised in this study.

It was also remarked that this study yielded enough material to formulate a number of hypotheses which might serve as a foundation for further investigation, such as the development of a series of specific questions to be tested on a larger sample drawn from a greater geographical area.

Finally, the panel agreed that the findings yielded by this study offer some empirical validation for continuing efforts at reintegrating and institutionalizing social work with groups as a method of practice in the educational curriculum:

> ...this is the kind of practice that we might see as a result of not having group work built into the curriculum - so studies like this are valuable...we need some good data - and this is a beginning step.

"Mutual Aid Amongst Ourselves"

The mutual-aid tendency...is so deeply interwoven with all the past evolution of the human race, that it has been maintained by mankind up to the present time, notwithstanding all vicissitudes of history...

For every one who has any idea of the life of the labouring classes it is evident that without mutual aid being practised among them on a large scale they never could pull through all their difficulties. In short, neither the crushing powers of the centralized State nor the teachings of mutual hatred...which came, adorned with the attributes of science, from obliging philosophers and sociologists, could weed out the feeling of human solidarity, deeply lodged in men's understanding and hearts, because it has been nurtured by all our preceding evolution.

And the need of mutual aid...re-asserts itself again, even in our modern society, and claims its rights to be, as it always has been, the chief leader toward further progress. (A)lthough the growth of the State on the pattern of Imperial Rome had put a violent end to all mediaeval institutions for mutual support, this new aspect of civilization could not last... The mutual-aid tendency finally broke down its iron rules...(Mutual aid) created the very conditions of society life in which man was enabled to develop his arts, knowledge, and intelligence; and the periods when institutions based on the mutual-aid tendency took their greatest development were also the periods of the greatest progress in arts, industry, and science...

In the practice of mutual aid, which we can retrace to the earliest beginnings of evolution, we thus find the positive and undoubted origin of our ethical conceptions; and we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support - not mutual struggle - has had the leading part. In its wide extension, even at the present time, we also see the best guarantee of a still loftier evolution of our race.[1]

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[1] Petr Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution, London: William Heinemann, 1908, pp. 223-300.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMATION

* * * * *

RESTATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Assuming a constant professional interest in maintaining professional practice standards and given the increasing use of small groups to provide agency-based social services, it was anticipated that a study aimed at exploring social workers' approaches to practice with groups would make a legitimate and significant contribution to the social work profession by adding to the existing body of group-practice-related research.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore and describe differences, if any, among social worker's approaches to their work with groups, most particularly as those approaches do or do not reflect a mutual-aid model of practice. More specifically, the question posed by this study is as follows:

> To what extent does there appear to be a relationship between professional education in the group work method and the tendency of practitioners to utilize mutual aid as a model for practice with groups?

METHODOLOGY REVIEWED

This study constitutes a preliminary inquiry into a specific area of social work practice. Given the paucity of research in this area, an exploratory-descriptive study intended to acquire qualitative data about social workers' approaches to work with groups was regarded as an appropriate design for addressing the research question. To that end, 30 MSW-level social work practitioners were interviewed; and the findings of this study have been generated from content analysis of their responses.

The following strategy was developed for this study:

A. design and development of a data collection instrument;

B. selection of respondents through a non-random purposive sampling process;

C. acquisition of data;

D. systematic organization of data;

E. content analysis;

F. acquisition of expert reflection on findings;

G. integration of expert reflection;

H. organization and presentation of the report.

Conceptual definitions (and to the extent possible, operational definitions) were developed for the three major variables of study.

Social group work education was defined as the successful completion of three or more group practice courses in an accredited two-year graduate school of social work in the United States.

Training was defined as participation in post-graduate workshops, seminars, courses, supervision, and co-leadership experiences offered by professional social workers and intended specifically to develop or enhance skill in social work with groups.

Finally, a mutual-aid approach to practice was defined as a method of work with groups which has as its driving force a belief in the potential for a multiplicity of helping relationships in the group, as evidenced by the extent to which a practitioner actively engages group members in helping one another assume responsibility for the management of group affairs.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

According to these findings, there are some very clear differences between the approach to practice of social workers who have been professionally educated and trained in social work with groups and the approach to practice of social workers who have not been professionally educated and trained in social work with groups. At the broadest level of analysis, education dramatically influences the nature of approach to practice with groups in terms of intent, expectation, and action.

It was never the purpose of this study to discover whether or not education has an impact on social work practice. That a relationship exists between these two variables is assumed. What has been explored by this study is the extent to which education influences a particular aspect of practice; namely, the exercise of certain skills which have long been theoretically associated with the raison d'etre of social work with groups. It was assumed that as professional social workers, the respondents would all share at the very least

a broad professional value base if nothing else; and it was in that spirit, therefore, that this study compared and contrasted their approaches to practice rather than compare their approaches with the approaches of other types of professionals, for example. And it is in this same spirit that the findings are presented here.

Themes of Difference in Approach to Practice with Groups

Introduction

At the highest level of abstraction, it might be said that the difference between the approaches to practice with groups of social workers who have been trained and those who have not been trained can be summed up in the word "intent;" and it is from this basic difference in approach to work with groups that all other differences flow.

Intent

Meeting Needs/Solving Problems

A clear difference in intent is highlighted by the extent to which GWS are need-centered in their approach to

practice while NGWS are problem-centered, a difference which is not apparently correlated with either nature of the group or work setting.

GWS consistently refer to the needs which bring individuals to the group, suggesting that they regard the group as a place in which needs will be satisfied. NGWS equally consistently refer to the problems which bring individuals into group membership, suggesting that the group will be a place in which problems will be solved. Unlike the problem-centered approach, the need-centered approach in no manner connotes need for change.

Of course, reference to need does not exclude the possibility that individuals will engage in problem-solving of any type. Unlike the problem-centered approach, however, the need-centered approach does not connote either the intent that the group will be based on the fact that individuals have problems to be resolved; nor does it connote the expectation that individuals who are group members are in the group because of problems.

Superficially, this particular difference may not immediately reflect the extent to which one or the other type of approach is based on a mutual-aid model. Presumably, one could have a problem-centered perspective of work with groups and still attempt to help group

members interact with one another in a meaningful way. Nevertheless, more in-depth analysis and reflection reveals that this difference does, in fact, bear on the extent to which practitioners are in a position (or not) to help group member effect a mutual-aid system.

A problem-centered approach to practice represents to some degree a movement away from the holistic perspective which has for so long been the hallmark of the social work profession. If the "problem" portion of the individual receives the greatest amount of attention in group (because of the manner in which the raison d'etre of group is conceptualized), then the "whole" individual may not, in fact, participate in the group. The strong, healthy portion which wants to act, react, and interact with others to the extent permitted by the environment (which in the case of the social work group is a small number of other individuals) - is, in effect, not in the group.

When discussing issues of composition in terms of homogeneity and heterogeneity, it was with some frequency that NGWS made statements like: "I wouldn't want an entire group of depressives," or "...paranoids," or "...borderlines;" clearly indicating that it was the problematic portion of the individual which was serving as NGWS' frame of reference for composition.

Since the concept of mutual aid is based on the assumption that people will bring and lend their strengths to other group members - strengths which emanate from those portions of the person which are not only not needy, but are strong enough to give to others - it is difficult to reconcile the problem-centered approach (which focuses on the need for help) with the development of a mutual-aid group (which focuses on the giving of help).

Paradoxically, even though social workers are trained to help their clients "partialize" problems - a process which is intended to make overwhelming problems become manageable - there appears to be a tendency on the part of at least some social workers to "partialize" their clients! To the extent that partializing a problem may be appropriate, the tendency to partialize an individual - particularly by practitioners who represent a profession which has as its root a holistic philosophy - is disconcerting.

The Group as System/The Group as Backdrop

Broadly speaking, GWS intend that their groups develop into systems in which they, the workers, will be displaced to a great extent as the helper. The worker

will not "disappear" from the group completely, but the worker will generally use specific skills intended to "work him/herself out of a job." The intent of GWS is that the group, as a system, will take on and take over its corporate affairs; and to that end, they help the members develop relationships which will permit and enable this autonomy to develop. Consequently, GWS perceive the member/member relationship to be the most integral one in the group, and so their basic intents for the group are primarily system-oriented.

NGWS, on the other hand, intend that their groups develop into stable environments within which they, the workers, will not only assume and maintain the primary responsibility for being helpful to members, but in which group members will primarily engage in individual problem-solving work; and to that end, they help group members identify issues, define goals, and work toward their achievement. In concert with this intent, NGWS regard the worker/member relationship as the most integral one in the group, and so their basic intents for the group are primarily individual-oriented.

The conceptualization of conflict is an excellent example of this difference in intent.

GWS routinely conceptualize conflict as an expectable consequence of group life; and when it occurs, the entire

group is intended to act, react, explore, define, describe, discuss - and otherwise participate in its exploration and resolution. In other words, GWS intend that the group as system essentially control - with stage-specific assistance by the worker - the process and outcome of its affairs, including that most threatening affair of all, conflict.

NGWS, on the other hand, who intend that their groups be primarily individual problem-solving milieus conceptualize conflict as an impediment to that task, and as an intrusive phenomenon, interpersonal conflict is expected to be kept to a minimum. Further, to the extent that it does occur in NGWS' groups, the workers tend to maintain a high degree of control over its exploration and resolution. Group members are not routinely involved; in fact, the very opposite is usually true: conflict is handled as an individual matter.

Approach to decision-making also reflects the extent to which the group is intended to become a system - a system in which each individual is heard and in which each individual has a say in what the group does and how it does it. Work toward consensus provides the opportunity for members to not just "vote" their opinions but to have their opinions count enough to be taken into account each

time there is a decision to be made - in contrast to the opportunity afforded by the democratic process, which is, essentially, the opportunity to be heard but not necessarily to count in the final outcome.

GWS intend group members to struggle through whatever process is necessary in order that a decision be reached with which all participants are satisfied. In other words, the group is conceptualized as a system in which the articulation of ideas, feelings, and opinions about the group's affairs is vital. In contrast, NGWS intend that the group reach a decision expeditiously - a position which reflects the acceptability of division, of winners and losers.

Emphasis on Means/Emphasis on Ends

The manner in which practitioners attend to stage-setting also highlights differences in intent. Goals of the first group meeting and the norms which the worker would like to see established represent to a great extent the foundation upon which the worker would like the group to develop.

While the nature of their earliest goals indicates that GWS are consistently preoccupied by intent to develop

a system of relationships which will play the central role in how the group operates, the nature of NGWS′ earliest goals suggest that are preoccupied by intent to develop a milieu in which they will help group members work toward their individual goals.

All practitioners want group members to feel that membership will be a worthwhile investment. While GWS appear to believe that it is early focus on fostering the member/member connection which will achieve that goal, however, NGWS appear to believe that it is fostering the member/work connection which will effect that same goal.

Consequently, while GWS devote the first session primarily to helping members connect with one another, NGWS devote the first session primarily to helping members connect with their work.

In sum, that GWS intend the interpersonal aspect to be a crucial aspect of the group experience is evidenced by the extent to which their early goals are oriented toward enhancing the member/member connection. In contrast, NGWS′ early emphasis on helping members connect with their task continues to imply that their primary intent is to develop a milieu in which the priority is individual goal achievement. And it is the worker/member relationship which will be integral to work toward task,

while the member/member relationship will remain relatively incidental.

It should not be inferred from this difference in intent that GWS do not care about work nor that NGWS do not care about how members relate to one another. There is a difference in emphasis, however, and this emphasis indicates significant variation in early focus.

Differences in this type of intent are again reflected by the decision-making process. As previously noted, while GWS routinely ask the group to grapple with the decision-making process toward consensus, NGWS routinely ask the group to vote. And although there may be occasions on which voting may be appropriate, it is nevertheless a method of decision-making which, if used routinely, is not only inherently divisive but one which emphasizes ends over means.

NGWS, therefore, do not appear to perceive decision-making as a crucial group-development process. The manner in which a group reaches decisions seems to be regarded merely as one of several possible methods - more or less efficient - for attaining some end, rather than as a "critical" opportunity for members to assume some control over their corporate affairs. Further, there is some tendency on the part of NGWS to predetermine options - a

tendency not apparently correlated with group purpose or characteristics of membership.

Not only does voting (not to mention predetermining options) limit members' opportunity to enhance old or learn new skills by preventing exploration of options and implications, it also denies all the participants one of the greatest rewards a group can offer - the birth of new possibilities.

The Acceptability of Conflict

The concept of norms further highlights differences in intent. As an aside, NGWS often confused norms with rules, suggesting one of two possibilities: either that they do not understand the difference between rules and norms, or that they believe the two concepts to be interchangeable.

Both sets of practitioners often referred to the norm of respect. Differences in conceptualization of norms were quite clear, however.

GWS primarily think about and refer to respect in the context of interaction, such as the norm of respect for difference, implying that in fact, they believe that differences will automatically occur as a result of group

life. Otherwise said, they **intend** difference to emerge in their groups; and they intend to help members respect its expression.

In contrast, NGWS think about and refer to a norm of respect mainly in the context of function, suggesting that for them, respect for difference is less an issue of interaction than one of respect for work; and they intend that differences in members' individual goals and the process of working toward those goals be respected. Such a perspective may result from the fact that to a great extent, interpersonal conflict has no legitimate place in NGWS' groups. In other words, why refer to a norm of respect for difference if it is not anticipated? Only practitioners who anticipate that interpersonal conflict will inevitably occur whenever individuals gather to interact are likely to tune in to that possibility and in such anticipation, actually **intend** that a norm for respecting those differences be established.

Expectations

Of Members

Whereas GWS articulate their major expectations in terms of the group as a whole, suggesting that their

primary focus of expectations is the group; NGWS articulate their major expectations in terms of the individual in the group, implying that their primary focus is the individual in the group.

That the group will increase its capacity for autonomy over time was a frequently-stated expectation of the GWS, while NGWS did not articulate this expectation. Further, the expectation of increased commitment was articulated far more frequently by GWS than by NGWS. NGWS' most frequently-stated expectation was a significant increase in group members' skill. For example, that "members will enter the group as individuals and leave as a community" is a typical expectation of GWS; while the expectation that "members will lower their defenses over time and be increasingly less afraid to participate" is typical of NGWS. The former statement reflects a group-level expectation, while the latter represents an individual-level expectation.

No explanation is immediately apparent for this difference. It may be that expectation level of commitment differs to begin with; or it may be that NGWS do not anticipate expectation of level of commitment to be heavily influenced by time; or it may be due to a genuine difference in perception of commitment in the first place.

For example, it could be that for NGWS, increased capacity for work (as reflected by the lowering of defenses) symbolizes increased commitment. In other words, as suggested one panelist (see Chapter Five), this apparent difference in nature of expectations "may boil down to just a question of semantics." On the other hand, as noted another panelist, semantics do come from some kind of framework; a vocabulary doesn't just develop in a vacuum.

Assuming these findings to accurately reflect a difference in perspective between the two sets of practitioners, such a difference might not, at first thought, seem very significant. As is often true in exploration, however, meaning can be found as easily in feeling as in fact. In this case, it almost seems as if strategies for obtaining commitment originate at two opposing vantage points, with one reflecting a position that encouraging spiritual commitment will effect temporal commitment and the other reflecting a position that temporal commitment will in effect bring about spiritual commitment. Hence, emphasis on helping group members find mutuality in the former case (increased group autonomy) and on helping members connect to task (increased skill) in the latter.

Certainly, GWS care about achieving purpose, and NGWS care about quality of process. This difference in emphasis does imply, however, that for GWS, the road traveled to an end is just as important as what lies at the end of that road. In fact, it may be said that the end itself is shaped and reshaped by the quality of that process, so that the end is always fluid, flexible, and constantly accommodating the needs of the individuals in the group and in so doing the group as a whole. In contrast, for the NGWS who are predominantly preoccupied with achieving ends, nature and quality of interaction is integral to the group process only to the extent that it impels or impedes movement toward those ends.

Finally, another major difference regards frame of reference. All practitioners articulated expectations of members over time. While GWS consistently referred to stage theory as their framework for articulating those expectations, however, there was virtually no mention of stage theory by NGWS. While GWS articulated their primary expectations in terms group development, NGWS articulated their primary expectations in terms of individual development, most particularly intrapsychic development.

It would be erroneous, however, to infer that GWS' expectations of individuals over time must not change;

since it seems obvious that contained within an expectation of increased group autonomy, for example, is the expectation of increased individual leadership. One cannot take place without the other. That their major expectations are focused on the group does indicate, however, that in thinking about expectations, GWS tend to conceptualize a continuum of change based on group-development rather than individual development. In other words, the group is clearly their context for thinking about expectations.

As will be noted in the last section related to intervention, using the group as primary frame of reference for expectations leads to conceptualizing the group as primary target of intervention; while using the individual as primary frame of reference for expectations leads to conceptualizing the individual as primary target of intervention.

Of Self

Respondents who conceptualize their role as one of many possible helpers are significantly more comfortable with the idea of forming new groups than those who perceive the worker as owning the lion's share of

responsibility for that task. Could this be related to expectations of who will be most responsible for what happens in the group?

While GWS routinely expect to "work themselves out of a job," there is no evidence that NGWS also expect such a process to occur over time. GWS expect group members to take over many leadership functions. They also expect to be more or less active in the group according to the stage of group development.

Although NGWS have expectations about how the passage of time will influence group members in a variety of ways, they do not appear to fully realize the implications of time on their own parallel leadership process. Although they have ideas about how members should change over time and opinions about what should be happening in the group generally, they have much less understanding of how their use of self should change according to time.

The most conspicuous explanation which suggests itself for this discrepancy is that the concept of a relationship between expectations of self and the passage of time is not perceived; ergo, it cannot be discussed. Even though all NGWS have tangible expectations about how the passage of time influences group members' feelings,

attitudes, and behaviors, they do not necessarily realize the implications for their own parallel process, i.e., what actions they should be taking over time to help what needs to happen happen. Otherwise said, even though a relationship between expectations of members and time may be clear, the existence of a coincident relationship between expectations of self time _in terms of group development_ is less clear.

That NGWS may not have expectations regarding use of self based on stage theory is a particularly important finding inasmuch as it strongly substantiates the inference that NGWS conceptualize the group as context for individual change rather than a system which itself changes over time and within which the parallel development of the individual and of the worker is understood.

The manner in which GWS and NGWS deal with conflict also illustrates differences in expectations of self. The extent to which NGWS assume responsibility for dealing with conflict implies that its resolution is primarily their responsibility. In other words, NGWS expect that they will be the principal authority in its resolution. This is an expectation which holds true regardless of the degree to which conflict is in fact tolerated. Although

the normal course of intervention is to deal with it as a private, individual matter; and even if it is addressed "en groupe," it is still always the worker who is expected to intervene.

Action

Finally, just as intent presupposes expectations and suggests certain actions, interventions may be said to reflect intent and expectations "in action."

As would be expected given the intensity with which GWS use the group as their frame of reference for developing expectations, they also consistently identify the group system as the primary target of intervention. At the same time, given the extent to which NGWS use the individual for formulating their expectations, it is not surprising that they routinely identify the individual as their primary target of intervention. In neither case is the group or individual targeted to the total exclusion of the other. There is, however, a strong tendency to select one over the other, and it is this tendency which reveals another major theme of difference.

The most important implication regarding target of intervention is that in the case of group-level

intervention, members are presumed to be capable of intervening in the group's affairs; while individual-level intervention presumes the worker as principal helper.

Further, not only does group-level intervention imply that members are expected to intervene in all of the group's affairs, it is also an important way for the worker to express faith in members' ability to do so. It is the worker's way of saying: "Whatever happens here, we will deal with it."

Individual-level intervention, on the other hand, essentially implies that members are not expected to intervene in all the group's affairs, i.e., that it is not their role to do so. Further, even if unwittingly, it conveys the message to the group members that they are incapable of managing their own affairs; that, in effect, it is the worker who is principal authority and helper - the person in the group who will "take care of things." "Whatever happens here, I will deal with it."

This concept of who "takes care of things" is especially germane to times of group distress, such as during conflict. Group-level intervention implies a willingness to let go of some control, to let the group grapple, often chaotically, with the expression of difference. In fact, grappling with differences -

attempts to express oneself and to understand others - is often the real challenge when individuals come together for a common purpose.

So, not only does group-level intervention inherently conceptualize conflict as a normal group issue but it further assumes that conflict isn't necessarily synonymous with annihilation - and, most poignantly of all - it makes a statement of faith in the group members - that when conflict is experienced, they will be able to deal with it.

Whatever shape it takes, conflict is perceived by NGWS as individual symptom in need of individual redress. Not only does this attitude indicate that the interpersonal chaos which normally occurs among a group of people who are engaged in common tasks is unacceptable, it also implies that conflict basically represents a threat to stability and control. Sometimes the NGW asks that related dialogue simply stop. Sometimes the "disruptive" individual is asked to leave the room. Sometimes the overtly-involved members are asked to set the conflict aside until the session's end at which time it can be addressed in private by the worker.

In essence, individual-level intervention conveys the message to the members that conflict is an individual issue, that dealing with it is the worker's primary

responsibility, and, most importantly, that members are presumed incapable of dealing with difference.

The manner in which workers intervene in cases of premature termination also illustrate a clear difference in primary level of intervention. GWS routinely target their intervention to the group itself. Everyone - worker and members alike - reaches out, reflecting the attitude that each specific individual is integral to the group, that his or her departure represents a specific issue of loss for the group to address, and that in some way, that particular individual's departure symbolizes the end of one Group and the beginning of Another. Membership is a group issue.

NGWS also routinely reach out to members who have left or who threaten to leave the group, but they do not routinely include other group members in this process. In other words, even though members are usually advised "en groupe" that an individual will not be returning and may be offered an explanation or interpretation, once again, the intervention is the responsibility of the worker alone. Membership is, in effect, an individual issue.

Finally, the manner in which workers evaluate the success of their groups also substantiates the inference

that NGWS perceive the group primarily as a context for individual work/change. While GWS routinely evaluate the success of the group with group members, NGWS are just as likely to evaluate the success of the group without input from the group members. Further, NGWS are very apt to request feedback from colleagues who have been in a position to observe group members' growth and change since the group began.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, if the expression of interpersonal difference is not conceptualized as a legitimate ingredient of the small group, whose purpose it is to enable individuals to gather around commonality and join forces in the giving and taking of help toward improved quality of life, then the interpersonal aspect of membership does not appear to be conceptualized as crucial to the experience.

If decision-making is not regarded as a process which inherently promotes or threatens unity of system; if it is acceptable, even the norm, for a group to have winners and losers, then unity of system itself may not be a central concept in approach to work with groups, suggesting that

the raison d'etre of the group is context for individual work, not development of a mutual-aid system.

If members may depart from a group with no manner of group process, it may also be said that membership is essentially member/worker, not member/member; and this perspective would confirm that such an approach to practice is based on the group as context for individual work rather than as system for mutual aid.

It is not inconceivable that a system approach to work with groups might cause some concern about individual anonymity in the group. In other words, if the focus is so intensely "group" oriented, is it not possible that the individual in the group might actually become lost?

It is proposed that on the contrary, an approach in which membership is conceptualized as a system issue assumes both the individuation of each member (i.e., the adoption of leadership and other functional roles) and their interdependence (i.e., the coordination of their efforts toward a "workable whole"). A system approach, in effect, epitomizes a holistic approach to work with groups.

On the other hand, an approach which perceives group membership as essentially an individual matter might, paradoxically, be more likely to lose or "abstract" the

individual than a system-oriented approach. To the extent that the interpersonal factor is not integral to the approach, then membership (gain or loss) may be said to relate primarily to "any" member rather than to a particular individual. In fact, such an attitude has been suggested to some degree by the easy manner in which NGWS ask so-called difficult group members or members engaged in overt conflict to leave the group and by the lack of group process around premature termination.

In conclusion, that NGWS conceptualize the group primarily as a context for individual change in a supportive environment and that their primary intent is to develop that environment is strongly substantiated by the extent to which their approach is problem-centered, the extent to which their early goals are work-oriented, the extent to which their frame of reference for expectations is the individual in the group, and the extent to which their interventions are levelled at individual group members rather than at the group as a whole. Further, their tendency to maintain centralized control suggests that they do not have a basic trust in members' capacity to engage in mutual aid.

That GWS conceptualize the group as a joint venture in mutual aid, a system in which each member is expected to integrally affect and effect the shape and movement of

the group experience, is strongly substantiated by the extent to which their approach is need-centered, the extent to which their early goals are process-centered, the extent to which their frame of reference for expectations is the group system, and the extent to which their interventions are levelled at the group as a whole.

Further, it would appear, as evidenced by their extensive attention to the "how to's" of group living, by their involvement of members in all aspects of the group experience, and by the extensive decentralization of authority in their groups, that GWS do have, in fact, a basic trust in members' capacity to engage in mutual aid.

IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Practice

These findings tend to substantiate the claims that there appear to be many social workers "out there" who are working with groups without having had the benefit of professional education in that method.

The major practice implication of this study is that every year, new generations of practitioners who feel unprepared by their professional education to work with

groups will continue to turn to whatever texts or other materials are readily available to them in an attempt to impose structure on to their practice. Although a desire to adopt a framework for practice rather than practice "off the cuff" is comprehensible, even commendable, that social workers turn to frameworks from without social work may result in practice which incorporates increasingly less the basic philosophies, values, and concepts of this profession as they pertain to work with groups.

This study already demonstrates very keenly that at least some untrained practitioners are working with groups according to frameworks which do not even include the most central element of social work with groups. Instead of practicing social work with groups, untrained workers are practicing what has been coined as "casework in a group." Instead of using the group process as the vehicle through which the helping transaction occurs, they view group process as incidental, as secondary to what they themselves can offer each group member. Unfortunately, however, work with groups from a social work perspective is <u>not</u> the casework transaction multiplied by X number of individuals. The central thesis of social work with groups is that it is the very multiplicity of helping relationships in the group which both quantitatively and qualitatively enhance the helping process. Both of these

dimensions are lost when it is the worker who assumes primary responsibility for meeting members' needs.

Implications for Social Work Education

In the study of social work method there are two levels of thought which beg for attention. One is theory; the other is "real world." On some occasions, theory and reality co-exist peacefully, and at other times they collide with great vigor. Nonetheless, even if difficult to realize, a theoretical ideal must necessarily exist as a standard against which "real world" activities can be measured. All too frequently courses in schools of social work are not accompanied by a mandate for coincident fieldwork experience. Consequently, only the theory of social work with groups is presented to students without also giving them the opportunity to examine theory "in action" and sharpen their skills. These findings clearly indicate that workers who have had opportunity to experience real consequences of theoretical propositions are not only more tuned into mutual aid as the raison d'etre of work with groups but that they are far more aware of their role as group workers as well. The gap in instruction also occasionally occurs in the reverse, i.e., students are asked to work with groups in the field while

they have no coincident classroom learning which can help them frame what they say, see, and do in the group and what other group participants say and do as well. In either position, the student receives only part of the education to which he or she is entitled.

With the growing popularity of work with groups, it would behoove those who shape curriculum policy to formally acknowledge the unique theories, concepts, and skills of social work with groups by reinstituting its instruction into the curriculum. Even on a small scale, this study indicates that social work schools are graduating professionals who are only partially prepared to fulfill a set of tasks which will in all likelihood become increasingly complex as resources become even scarcer and the global community becomes a global village. It is disconcerting that in this era of effectiveness study, it is the work with groups being carried on by social workers untrained in social work with groups which will more often than not constitute the basis for judging effectiveness.

Implications for the Profession

If the concept of mutual aid is lost to social work practice, then social work with groups will eventually be

regarded as one of many possible forms of "group therapy," with its unique aspects lost. If the very concept which drives social work with groups is being increasingly lost to social workers, then another very central concept of social work generally, i.e., empowerment, will become lost as well; because in social work with groups, it is mutual aid which embodies empowerment.

The social work profession has an obligation to produce professionals who are capable of carrying out its mandates. Many opportunities for the profession to better meet this mandate are envisioned, such as exchanges between educational institutions and social service agencies or the development of a formal (inter)national training and consultation network, sanctioned and promoted by all of the professional regulatory bodies. In the former case, for example, social work schools might enroll a number of practitioners each year to audit courses in social work with groups without charge. In the alternative, schools might consider instituting special certification courses designed specifically for practitioners who would like to receive (more) training in social work with groups. Some currently cffer assistance on how to develop a private practice. Continuing education credits in method might be even more pertinent...particularly if private practitioners are going to work with groups!

Finally, these findings imply that even within the academic system, there needs to be a forum through which instructors who are expected to teach social work with groups improve or otherwise extend their knowledge of this method. Given that only five schools of social work graduate students who have had the opportunity to engage in intense learning in this method (Birnbaum et al., 1989), it would not be illogical to assume that most (new) instructors will continue to be lacking in this knowledge base.

ASSESSMENT OF METHODOLOGY DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Assessment of Methodology

The broad purpose of this study was to explore and describe social work practitioners' approaches to working with groups. More specifically, its purpose was to assess the extent to which their approaches incorporated a central ingredient of social work with groups, namely, mutual aid. To that end, this study has been successful. All of the questions included on the interview schedule which were included specifically because they were

believed to "tap into" one or another aspect of approach to practice have been addressed.

Further, in order that findings not be based solely on self-reports, respondents were asked to share specific case illustrations; and with few exceptions, the examples of practice yielded a sufficient amount of qualitative data in addition to the self-reports to enable an in-depth content analysis of approach.

The findings were also shared with a number of professionally-recognized senior social workers, whose feedback greatly enhanced this study. Not only did their comments and observations add another dimension to this exploration, their questions also initiated even further reflection and analysis of areas which had produced findings with unclear implications.

Directions for Further Study

The conclusions of this study suggest several possible avenues of further investigation. First, given the paucity of this type of research in social work with groups, it is proposed that a qualitative approach be pursued with greater breadth and in greater depth.

For example, this study or very similar studies should be carried out in other areas of the country, such

as those in which there is likely to be less collegial contagion. Given that two of the five schools of social work which still teach social work with groups as a method are located in New York City, it would be difficult to replicate this study in areas of greater professional contagion!

Another possibility for further investigating the role of mutual aid in practice with groups would be to ask the question of the client. For example, feedback could be obtained directly from clients about the extent to which they perceive mutual aid as integral to the group experience, the extent to which they believe they experience mutual aid in their own membership, and their perspectives of worker role.

Finally, observation of direct practice would be highly useful in assessing the coincidence between what respondents say they do and what they actually do in their group sessions.

The conclusions of this study also suggest related areas for future research, any one of which could be investigated independently. For example, the researcher might wish to ask the following:

-> To what extent does the specific nature of the group influence workers' approach to practice?

-> To what extent does the specific purpose of the group influence workers' approach to practice?

-> To what extent does the structure of the group influence workers' approach to practice?

-> To what extent does socialization have an impact on approach to practice with groups, generally, and more specifically, on workers' attitudes toward control and conflict?

-> Does gender have an impact on approach to practice with groups, and if so, to what extent and in which specific areas?

-> What is the nature of the relationship, if any, between pre-group planning and approach to work with groups?

-> What, if any, is the impact of purpose of group on workers' attitude toward, and exercise of, control?

-> What, if any, is the impact of structure of group on workers' attitude toward, and exercise of, control?

-> To what extent do specific membership characteristics play a role in workers' attitudes toward, and exercise of, control?

-> What, if any, is the impact of purpose of group on worker's attitude toward, and intervention in, group conflict?

-> What, if any, is the impact of structure of group on workers' attitude toward, and intervention in, conflict?

-> To what extent do specific membership characteristics play a role in workers' attitudes toward, and intervention in, conflict?

-> To what extent are differences in the articulation of expectations of self over the passage of time a reflection of semantics?

-> Are there any differences between trained and untrained workers in how they conceptualize membership roles; and further, what are their attitudes toward their emergence?

-> In what other significant ways does approach to work with groups from a need-centered or a problem-centered orientation influence practice?

Although no particular question on the interview schedule addressed this last issue, that there was such a clear difference between the subsamples with regard to their orientation suggests that it may have other significant implications.

Related Areas for Further Exploration

One rather remarkable finding of this study was that only one respondent was receiving any supervision on work with groups at time of study. Is this a manifestation of the profession's general attitude toward work with groups? This finding was only noted in the section on the sample and its characteristics, but given the expectation that professional practice occurs with some form of supervision, it merits further investigation.

To that end, it might be useful to replicate to some extent the Boston University School of Social Work study (Wayne and Garland, 1990) with social workers in various areas of the country to assess not only the nature and supervision on work with groups which is being conducted generally, but to assess the extent to which there is congruence between nature/extent of supervision as reported by practitioners and as reported by their supervisors.

Finally, a study of instructors (e.g., educational and professional background, including training on social work with groups) and instruction (e.g., specific nature of course work, hours of course work, and nature of course materials) could further shed some light onto the manner in which instruction in the method of social work with groups is being carried out today, particularly if such a study were to include a comparison with student reports.

The recommendations for further study presented above are certainly not exhaustive; there are undoubtedly many other possibilities for study. Nonetheless, the conclusions of this study suggest that the exploration of any one of the above-noted areas would be useful in further understanding the relationship between education and approach to practice with groups.

APPENDIX A

APPROACH TO WORK WITH GROUPS: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The purpose of this interview is to formulate a picture of your approach to working with groups, especially as it relates to the use of mutual aid.

---

1. What types of groups have you led since you received your MSW (i.e., populations, problems, settings, etc.)

2. What word would best describe how you feel when you're asked to form a new group?

3. Do you have an opinion about the types of populations for which groups are the a) best suited? b) least well suited?

4. What do you think makes for good or bad group composition?

5. How would you state the goals of any first group meeting?

   Please think back to your latest "first session" and recall as best you can what you said and did to go about reaching those goals?

6. Please describe how you see your role/s in a group and for each give an example of how you have actualized that role during any past group session.

7. To what extent do you like to maintain control over what goes on in a group?

   Can you give any examples of ways in which you do/do not maintain control?

8. Please think back to a time when a group member was in a role that had a negative impact on the group and describe that situation and your intervention, if any.

9. What are the norms you hope will develop in a group? Can you describe some ways in which you help them come about?

10. Please think back to when a conflict occurred in a group and describe how it came about, what actually happened (who did or said what) and how (if) the conflict was resolved.

11. Please think back to a time when an important decision affecting the group needed to be made and describe how that decision was reached.

12. Have you ever led a group in which a member terminated his or her membership prematurely?

    If so, please describe to the best of your recollection what happened.

13. How does the passage of time (over the life of the group) affect your expectations of members? Can you recall a past group situation which reflected those changed expectations?

14. How does the passage of time (over the life of the group) affect the expectations of yourself as group leader?

    Can you recall a past group situation which reflected those changed expectations?

15. How did you evaluate the success of your last group?

16. What's the greatest caution you'd share with someone about to lead a group for the first time?

17. What's the one greatest piece of wisdom/advice you'd share with someone about to lead a group for the first time?

18. How would you define mutual aid?

    Could you give an example of an instance in a group that in your opinion really reflected mutual aid "in action"?

19. Is there any particular literature you would assign to someone about to work with groups for the first time?

20. Where and when did you receive your MSW?

    How much, if any, and in what way(s) was your curriculum devoted to work with groups?

21. Have you had any post-graduate training specific to working with groups?

    If so, please describe this training as fully and accurately as possible.

22. Are there any experiences not covered in Q's 20/21 which you believe have particularly affected (either positively or negatively) your perspective of groups as a helping method?

    If so, please elaborate.

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX B

Dear (Respondent):

Thanks very much for agreeing to meet with me. I've written us in for (date) at (time) at (location).

Enclosed please find the interview questions to look over before we meet.

If you think a question needs to be clarified or feel unable to answer a question or can't think of an example, please don't worry about it. Just let me know that when we meet.

As I said on the telephone, the interview should take 90 minutes. Everything you say will of course be kept confidential, and all references to the material in my report will be anonymous.

I'm looking forward to meeting with you. If you need to talk with me before we meet, you can reach me at (telephone number).

Otherwise, see you on the (date), and thanks again!

Sincerely,

Dominique Moyse-Steinberg

Enclosure

APPENDIX C

APPROACH TO WORK WITH GROUPS: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE/WORKING COPY

The purpose of this interview is to formulate a picture of your approach to working with groups, especially as it relates to the use of mutual aid.

---

1. What types of groups have you led since you received your MSW (i.e., population, problems, settings, etc.) issue: background data

---

2. What word would best describe how you feel when you're asked to start a new group? issue: general attitude toward work with groups

---

3. Do you have an opinion about the types of populations for which groups are the a) best suited? b) least well suited? issue: professional perspective of group as helping method

---

4. What do you think makes for good or bad group composition? issue: relationship of composition to mutual-aid/interaction

---

5. How would you state the goals of any first group meeting?

   Please think back to your latest first session and recall as best you can what you said and did to go about reaching those goals? issue: stage-setting

6. Please describe how you see your role/s in a group and for each give an example of how you have actualized that role during past group session. issue: professional perspective of worker role

---

7. To what extent to you like to maintain control over what goes on in a group?

   Can you give any examples of ways in which you do or do not maintain control? issue: power

---

8. Please think back to a time when a group member was in a role that had a negative impact on the group and describe the situation and your intervention, if any. issue: member participation

---

9. What are the norms you hope will develop in a group?

   Can you describe some of the ways in which you help them to happen? issue: stage-setting

---

10. Please think back to when a conflict occurred in a group and describe how it came about, what actually happened (who did or said what) and how (if) the conflict was resolved. issue: member participation

11. Please think back to a time when an important decision affecting the group needed to be made and describe how that decision was reached. issue: member participation

---

12. Have you ever led a group in which a member terminated his or her membership prematurely?

    If so, please describe to the best of your recollection what happened. issue: member participation

---

13. How does the passage of time (over the life of the group) affect your expectations of members?

    Can you recall a past group situation which reflected those changed expectations? issue: time, expectations of members, and mutual aid

---

14. How does the passage of time (over the life of the group) affect the expectations of yourself as group leader?

    Can you recall a past group situation which reflected those changed expectations? issue: time, expectations of self, and mutual

---

15. How did you evaluate the success of your last group? issue: criteria for success; whose

16. What's the greatest caution you'd share with someone about to lead a group for the first time? issue: general attitude toward work with groups

---

17. What's the one greatest piece of wisdom/advice you'd share with someone about to lead a group for the first time? issue: general attitude toward work with groups

---

18. How would you define mutual aid?

    Could you give an example of an instance in a group that in your opinion really reflected mutual aid "in action?" issue: perception of mutual aid behaviors

---

19. Is there any particular literature you would assign to someone about to work with groups for the first time? issue: theoretical orientation

---

20. Where and when did you receive your MSW?

    How much, if any, and in what way(s) was your curriculum devoted to work with groups?

---

21. Have you had any post-graduate training specific to working with groups?

    If so, please describe this training as fully and accurately as possible.

---

22. Are there any experiences not covered in Q's 20/21 which you believe have particularly affected (either positively or negatively) your perspective of groups as a helping method? If so, please elaborate.

APPENDIX D

PANEL OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERTS

Professor Cyrus S. Behroozi
Indiana University
School of Social Work
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Professor Margot Breton
Toronto University
School of Social Work
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Professor Leonard Brown
Rutgers University
School of Social Work
Newark, New Jersey, USA

Professor Alex Gitterman
Columbia University
School of Social Work
New York, New York, USA

Professor Theodore Goldberg
Wayne State University
School of Social Work
Birmingham, Michigan, USA

Professor Ruth Middleman
University of Louisville
Kent School of Social Work
Louisville, Kentucky, USA

APPENDIX E

Dear (Prospective Panel Member):

The purpose of this letter is to request your participation in a round-table discussion during the upcoming Akron conference.

I am currently completing my doctoral studies at Hunter College SSW, and in the interest of fully exploring my subject, "The Impact of Group Work Education on Social Work Practitioners' Approaches to Work With Groups," I would like to obtain expert reflection on the qualitative data I have gathered.

The purpose of my study is to explore differences, if any, between approaches of MSW's who have been educated in social group work and those who have not, with special attention to the extent to which their approaches reflect a mutual-aid model of practice. To this end, I conducted thirty interviews with practitioners in the New York City area this past summer; and it is the results of those interviews I would like to present to you for feedback.

Specifically, I am asking that you join a few of your colleagues in a 90-minute informal round table, starting at 11:30 a.m. on Friday, at which I will present a summary of my findings and ask for your reactions. This time does not conflict with either the Board or membership meetings.

I hope you will be able to participate in this process and look forward to hearing from you. Enclosed please find a self-addressed and stamped postcard for that purpose.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Dominique Moyse-Steinberg

Enclosure

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