Group approaches in psychiatry

J. Stuart Whiteley
and John Gordon

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J. Stuart Whiteley, MB ChB FRCP(Ed) MRCPsych
DPM
and
John Gordon, BA (Harvard)
Henderson Hospital
Sutton, Surrey

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Introduction

Our book attempts to cover the field of group interaction in psychiatry. We look at small, large and specialised groups, not only for their treatment potential but also for the way that groups determine the course and mode of interpersonal activity.

Human life is group life, and mental illness becomes manifest in the group situation when we have to relate to, communicate with and respond to the expectations of others.

The book is largely a review of the field and in some instances a review of reviews. We can draw upon our personal experiences and research findings and present original data and thought in certain areas where we may have had the opportunity to achieve an extra dimension of experience, e.g. the *therapeutic community*, but this is not the primary aim of the book. Instead, we are trying to present to the trainee psychiatrist, social worker, nurse or other aspiring group worker in the mental health professions a summary of what he should know about group work in psychiatry.

We deliberately draw upon both the psychological and the sociological areas of knowledge and exploration because of our belief in the social basis of mental illness. Above all, we hope that the book is a practical guide to what happens in a group and how to channel what happens into a beneficial therapeutic course.

Contents

The living group I

'Why a group ?', asks many a patient to whom group therapy is suggested. 'I'm ill and I want to see a doctor, not people who are as bad as I am.'

We live and work in groups and find in our personal interactions with others sources of emotional satisfaction and growth. Throughout our lives we are subjected to the demands and the pressure of groups, both small and large, from the family to society in general, and we are ill-equipped to survive without the co-operation of and contact with fellow human beings. Human behaviour in the group is different from the behaviour of the individual alone or in a dyad. In the group we have to be aware of and respond to the cues and signals of a number of other people. We have to compromise and abandon our own egocentric needs in order to maintain our place in the group, but at the same time group membership offers us strength and support. Major threats, such as loss of employment or even loss of life, can be faced and overcome by the group that bands together to institute a work-in or mobilises its resources to withstand a siege or bombardment. Indeed, the threat from outside is one of the most powerful incentives to group formation and cohesion. The strengths and the resources of such a group, however, do not rest on its material attributes alone but to a great extent on the emotional fervour that is engendered by group participation. This fundamental two-level quality of group life and functioning is one that pervades all considerations of group behaviour.

Social behaviour in groups

The study of group behaviour (Le Bon, 1895) took root in the latter part of the nineteenth century and was initially based on

observations of crowd phenomena. Freud (1921) introduced into this descriptively accurate work his developing psychoanalytic theories, and social scientists began systematically to investigate group structure and processes. Gradually two streams of major enquiry evolved – a group *analytic* and a group *dynamic* course.

Long before this, the particular qualities and behavioural propensities of the crowd had been, at least implicitly, recognised and put to use by powerful leaders in the military, political, religious and revolutionary fields. Wesley was one who stirred large congregations to confession of their sins and conversion to God by playing on the suggestibility, dependency, primitive fears and the need to belong which the large group engenders. The mobs of the French Revolution were stirred by manipulative leaders into violent behaviour that, as individuals with a personal responsibility to bear, few of them would have contemplated.

Nearer to our own times, the mass rallies of the Nazi leaders similarly utilised all the factors that would induce the individual to abandon his self-control and critical judgement to the power of the group. Ritualistic behaviour, slogans to chant, uniforms to wear and colours to carry, all draw the individual into the mass identity of the group which seems above individual responsibility and guilt in its pursuit of 'the cause'. The projection of all that is bad on to the outside—in this case the Jewish race—finally unifies the group against the alleged threat from without, and the charismatic leader can mould the group's forces at his will and to his own purpose.

While these examples illustrate the manipulation of group forces by the leader, we can also see how membership of the group gives to the individual a vital force that may otherwise be lacking from his individual existence.

Each generation throws up its cult or fashionable clique around which, in particular, young people who lack a secure identity or feeling of well-being and purpose will gather with enthusiasm. In the United Kingdom to some extent the armed forces provided such a group identity during and immediately after World War II. Following this period, but in a less socially acceptable way, Teddy Boys, Skinheads and Rockers in their turn provided the common uniform, the in-group behaviour, the mutual support of the membership and the illusion that whatever the group did was above, or not answerable to, the dictates of individual conscience or wider social values.

The phenomenon of football fan violence illustrates the fragility and vulnerability of individual intentions when confronted with the influence of group forces, particularly the automatic compliance that is typical of large groups that lack strong leadership. Historically, football supporters have been promoted by the clubs as a 'good' thing, both for the team and for the benefits that membership of a social group can give to people with otherwise featureless lives. The colours, the songs and chants and the competition with rivals have been fostered with good intent, but, without clear leadership from above, subversive secondary leaders have taken over and diverted the ready-made mobs to their own purposes of violence, excitement and social disturbance, in a way that has little or nothing to do with the parent club.

The study of mass behaviour

It is this loss of self-responsibility and surrender to a mob rule that particularly caught the attention of the early observers. Le Bon (1895), whom Freud quotes extensively and with respect, clearly sets the scene, and we can do no better than begin with a summary from Freud's own account in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). Le Bon remarked upon the fact that when individuals are transformed into a group they are 'put in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think and act if he were in a state of isolation'. Le Bon explained this transformation in terms of the emergence in groups of a racial unconscious, a substratum of inherited characteristics which imbues every individual thought, feeling and action with an average quality. He describes group behaviour as barbaric, impulsive, changeable and ruled by fantasy. The group has a sense of omnipotence, reacting in extremes, simply but with exaggerated feelings and excited only by excessive stimuli.

The members act on instinct like a child or primitive being. At times contradictory ideas may exist and be tolerated side by side. Freud believed that group membership merely provides the conditions under which the individual could throw off the repressions of his unconscious impulses, and that the different behaviour that results is due to the expression of these unconscious drives. While Le Bon considers the heightened susceptibility and contagion of group behaviour as a form of hypnosis, Freud attributes

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the uniformities of group life to the basic similarity of the under-lying unconscious drives which are now given outlet.

Jung (1936), incidentally, makes several references to the same primitive phenomena in the mass which he also attributes to unconscious drives and archetypal functioning: 'A gentle and reasonable being can be transformed into a maniac or a savage beast and one is always inclined to lay blame on external circumstances but nothing could explode in us if it had not been there' (Jung, 1938).

Freud notes, however, that the concepts of contagion, hypnosis and suggestibility—'The conditions under which influence without logical foundation takes place'—must themselves be analysed. At this point in the argument, Freud introduces his principal contribution. 'We will try our fortune, then, with the supposition that love relationships (or to use a more neutral expression, emotional ties) also constitute the essence of the group mind.' In effect, Freud postulates that, psychologically, group formation is the result of the mutual identification of members with one another on the basis of their love for the leader (or for certain ideas and values). This love is a derivative of the early libidinal relationship between child and parent and as such is the emotional foundation not only of mutual identification but of the susceptibility and voluntary obedience of group members to the will of the leader. Loss or absence of the leader can lead to panic and disintegration of the group, and Freud mentions the collapse of the German army in 1918, primarily because the officers neither merited nor nourished the libidinal ties between themselves and the soldiers in the field.

The two features of group behaviour that Le Bon and other observers emphasise are the inhibition of intellectual functioning and the heightening of affectivity. But Freud also refers to evidence that the 'group mind' is capable of more productive work and cites the development of language, folklore and the general stimulus that a social group may give to an individual who then goes on to achieve intellectual or cultural accomplishments. Indeed, Freud distinguishes between short-lived groups—e.g. a revolutionary group, which might have just the dramatic qualities that Le Bon recounts—and stable, more organised groups in normal society. Since leadership is a crucial factor, Freud pays particular attention to the role of the leader in large social groups such as the church and the army. Subsequent theoretical writings on group psycho-

therapy stress these same fundamental aspects of groups, i.e. intense emotional involvement with a corresponding intellectual deficiency unless clear leadership directs the vast group energies into productive channels.

Despite his awareness of group phenomena, Freud did not utilise the group in psychiatric treatment, perhaps because his major interest lay more in the further elaboration of psychoanalysis as a scientific psychology and as a research instrument for the study of intra-psychic functioning. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* he is directing his attention to the wider aspects of society rather than to the small group as we would know it today. However, there were, even in the 1920s, a small number of psychoanalysts, headed by Trigant Burrow, who did come to see the possibility of analysis in a group setting. Burrow (1926a) took the view 'that it was futile to attempt to remedy mental disease occurring within the individual mind as long as psychiatry remains blind to the existence of mental disease within the social mind'. Burrow, with his students, founded the Lifwynn Foundation in 1927 to further study this possibility, but the practice of *treatment in groups* was slow to develop (see chapter 2).

The study of group dynamics

The study of *group behaviour*, however, was gradually refined and moved from descriptions of the crowd to more theoretical and scientifically designed explorations of everyday social groups.

One of the first social psychologists to move into the field was William McDougall, whose thesis in *The Group Mind* (1920) asserted the reality of a group mind independent of the individual group members. His work was critically received, but nevertheless provoked considerable debate. F. H. Allport, McDougall's leading antagonist, exposed 'the group fallacy' (1924, quoted in Mills, 1962):

alike in crowd excitements, collective uniformities and organised groups, the only psychological elements are discoverable in the behaviour and consciousness of the specific persons involved. All theories which partake of the group fallacy have the unfortunate consequence of diverting attention from the true locus of cause and effect, namely, the behavioural mechanism of the individual . . . If we take care of individuals,

psychologically speaking, the groups will be found to take care of themselves.

McDougall's analysis, however, was more than an exercise in mystical reification. He stressed the factor of organisation in groups and listed five principal conditions of organisation:

1 some degree of continuity of existence in the group for some time, either material (the same individuals stay in the group), or formal (a number of individuals occupy a system of fixed positions);
2 the members must have some idea of the nature, composition, functions and capacities of the group so that an emotional relationship to the whole group evolves;
3 the group must interact with other groups;
4 the group should have customs, traditions and habits, especially those that regulate inter-member relationships; and
5 the group should have a definite structure reflecting the specialisation and differentiation of functions of its constituents.

Freud, who quoted McDougall (1920) in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), interpreted McDougall's concept of organisation as an attempt to equip the group with the attributes of the individual, particularly of the *ego*. But McDougall's emphasis on group structure, and the implication of his third condition that groups exist in a wider environment, provided a theoretical framework within which a group-level concept, such as a group goal, could be logically derived without neglecting the existence of individual group members (see the discussion of Mills and of Cartwright and Zander on the group goal in chapter 3).

The dispute within social psychology over the nature of groups led to the production of research evidence (Hunt, 1964) that accounted for the common attitudes, beliefs and goals attributed to a group mind in terms of processes of communication in groups (Allport, 1920, 1924, 1934; Jenness, 1932a, 1932b; Bernard, 1924); conformity-inducing pressures (Dickens and Solomon, 1938; Dudycha, 1937; Harvey, 1935); sympathy (Mead, 1934); imitation (Miller and Dollard, 1941) and suggestibility (Hull, 1933).

Four studies were particularly influential in setting the foundation for subsequent *group dynamics* research.

Informal norms and task effectiveness

An important series of investigations was carried out between 1927 and 1932 by Mayo at the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne Works in Chicago (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). The term *'Hawthorne effect'* derived from some unanticipated findings, in groups of workers subjected to experimental conditions, that no relation existed between any manipulation of the experimental variable—e.g. the level of illumination in workshops—and industrial production. Rather, a worker's productivity increased in the experimental groups even when illumination was decreased, dropping only when the light became so dim that no one could see properly. Increased production was therefore attributed to 'the changed social situation of the workers, modifications in their level of psychological satisfaction, and new patterns of social interaction, brought about by putting them into the experiment room and the special attention involved' (Etzioni, 1964).

The major finding of Mayo's research was the significance of social factors and, in particular, of group membership. The amount of work carried out by any individual worker was set by social norms, not physiological capacity. Non-economic rewards and sanctions, such as the affection and respect of colleagues, affected a worker's behaviour and could limit incentive plans. Also, workers held beliefs about the minimum work required of them so as not to endanger their jobs and about the maximum they could produce before pay rates might be reduced. These beliefs regarding the expectations of management were found to be objectively untrue, but they nevertheless influenced the group norms for production. As group members,

> each individual did not feel free to set up for himself a production quota; it was set and enforced by the group. Workers who deviated significantly in either direction from the group norms were penalised by their co-workers. Individual behavior is anchored in the group. A person who will resist pressure to change his behavior as an individual will often change it quite readily if the group of which he is a member changes its behavior [Etzioni, 1964].

The experimental creation of social norms

Sherif (1936) designed a rigorous laboratory experiment to investigate the *autokinetic effect*, based on comparisons between an

individual's perceptions alone and in the company of two or three others. The autokinetic effect is easily created by presenting a point of light to a person in complete darkness when he will see the light appearing in different places in the room each time. This is not an artificial phenomenon but results from the fact that 'in a completely dark room a single point of light *cannot* be localised definitely, because there is nothing in reference to which you can locate it' (Sherif, 1936).

Sherif was primarily interested in two problems (1936):

(1) What will an individual do when he is placed in an objectively unstable situation in which all basis of comparison, as far as the external field of stimulation is concerned, is absent ? And (2) What will a group of people do in the same unstable situation ? Will the different individuals in the group give a hodgepodge of judgments ? Or, will they establish a collective point of reference ? If so, of what sort ? If every person establishes a norm, will it be his own norm and different from the norms of others in the group ? Or will there be established a common norm, peculiar to the particular group situation and depending upon the presence of these individuals together and their influence upon one another ?

Sherif, in fact, found that an isolated individual developed a range of judgements as to the perceived movement of a point of light and within that range established a reference point (norm or standard) that was peculiar to the individual. Successive judgements were given within the range and in relation to the subjective reference point. Once a range and point of reference were established, they tended to persist over second and third trials of 100 judgements. The ranges and norms of individuals varied.

On the other hand, when individuals for the first time faced the situation as group members, a range and standard within the range were also established that were specific to the group. 'If, for the group, there is a rise or fall in the norms established in successive sessions, it is a group effect; the norms of the individual members rise and fall toward a common norm in each session,' writes Sherif. To the possible objection that the group norm was merely the leader's norm, and that the leader was uninfluenced by the other members, Sherif replied that, empirically, a leader's judgements (i.e. first judgements) were observed to be influenced eventually by those of his followers. If the leader changed his

norm after the group norm was established, he ceased to be followed.

Sherif also discovered that when individuals who had first established their own ranges and norms were put together in a group, the ranges and norms tended to converge; this convergence, however, was less than if they had first worked together as a group without the opportunity to stabilise their individual norms.

Finally, once a member's group norm was fixed, and he was subsequently presented with the experimental stimulus, he perceived the situation in terms of the group range and norm instead of his initial subjective reference. Sherif's experiment demonstrated the formation of social norms and supported sociological and anthropological findings 'that new and supra-individual qualities arise in group situations'.

Social norms in a natural group

Newcomb (1943) also carried out a study of social norms, using attitude questionnaires and interviews to determine the political views of university students. The focus of this investigation was on the power of the group, in this case the university community, to effect changes in the students' attitudes. Since most entering students came from 'conservative' backgrounds, they tended to hold opinions and beliefs that differed from the more 'liberal' university atmosphere. Newcomb's data—comparisons between senior and freshman students—regularly showed that the former held more 'liberal' views, which tended to be rewarded in terms of status (selected more often to represent the university in the wider society) and good reputation (seen by others to identify more with the university).

Newcomb's study showed how conflicting group loyalties, in this case between the home family group and the university group, together affected the formation and adoption of attitudes (1958):

In this community, as presumably in most others, all individuals belong to the total membership group, but such membership is not necessarily a point of reference for every form of social adaptation, e.g., for acquiring attitudes toward public issues. *Such attitudes, however, are not acquired in a social vacuum. Their acquisition is a function of relating oneself to some group or groups, positively or negatively . . .* in a community characterised by certain approved attitudes, the

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individual's attitude development is a function of the way in which he relates himself both to the total membership group and to one or more reference groups.

Interaction and the development of informal structures

W. F. Whyte relied on his own observations of the Norton Street gang and the Italian Community Club. His participant's account of the interactions of the corner boys in an urban 'street-corner society' is one of the most readable in the small group literature. Whyte (1943) conveyed a vivid picture of the importance and functions of these groups in the lives of their members, who often remained in a group from early boyhood until their thirties:

> Home plays a very small role in the group activities of the corner boy. Except when he eats, sleeps or is sick, he is rarely at home, and his friends always go to his corner first when they want to find him. Even the corner boy's name indicates the dominant importance of the gang in his activities. It is possible to associate with a group of men for months and never discover the family names of more than a few of them. Most are known by the nicknames attached to them by the group. Furthermore, it is easy to overlook the distinction between married and single men. The married man regularly sets aside one evening a week to take out his wife. There are other occasions when they go out together and entertain together, and some corner boys devote more attention to their wives than others, but married or single, the corner boy can be found on his corner almost every night of the week.
>
> The life of the corner boy proceeds along regular and narrowly circumscribed channels . . .
>
> The stable composition of the group and the lack of social assurance on the part of its members contribute toward producing a very high rate of social interaction within the group. The group structure is a product of these interactions.
>
> The individual member has a way of interaction which remains stable over a long period of time. His mental well-being requires continuance of his way of interacting.

Whyte discerned a system of mutual obligations within the group which was vital to its cohesion and survival. Often, underlying obligations came to light only when a relationship between

members broke down. Violations of obligations were related to status, and the group leader could not fail to meet his personal obligations without jeopardising his position and causing confusion. A member's position in the gang structure determined his initiatives in proposing action for the group; a leader frequently proposed action, often relying on his subordinates to communicate with the other members, while a follower suggested action to the leader only if they were alone. Whyte's emphasis on processes of interaction and the social structure within a group influenced many subsequent studies.

Sociometry

Finally, Moreno and his associate Jennings should be mentioned, not so much for a specific study as for the invention of a technique —the sociometric test—that is widely used in group research. Moreno is well known for his therapeutic innovations, psychodrama and sociodrama, which he developed in Vienna and New York in the 1930s.

The sociometric test involves simply asking the members of a group to choose and reject other members in accordance with some criterion; usually members are asked whom they like and dislike the most, or with whom they would and would not like to work on a particular task. The pattern of interpersonal choice affords an insight into the formal social structure of the group.

Moreno (1951) characterised the structure in terms of the numbers of isolated members (those who neither choose nor are chosen by anyone else); unchosen members; mutual attractions (pairs); chains (linked choices, but not necessarily mutual); triangles (three mutual choices); and stars (chosen by many but chooses no one in return).

Measures of group cohesiveness have been derived from sociograms, diagrammatic representations of interpersonal choices, which can be subjected to sophisticated statistical and matrix algebra analysis. Moreno intended that the results of sociometric tests be used to reorganise the group by putting together people who were compatible (i.e. who had chosen each other), but this practical application of the method has rarely been used. His own experience with the test is described in Moreno's major work, Who Shall Survive? (1934), and ongoing research was reported in the journal Sociometry which was founded in 1937 (Moreno, 1941, 1947, 1954; Moreno and Jennings, 1944; Jennings, 1950).