Brit. J. Psychiat. (1981), **138**, 167–168

Reading About . . .

Group Psychotherapy

by Sidney Bloch

Group psychotherapy is perhaps a misleading term and the concept of the *group psychotherapies* probably better represents the broad range of psychological treatments in psychiatry in which the group process is an essential component: from psychotherapy with a married couple to the large community group meeting in a psychiatric hospital. Group psychotherapy most commonly refers to the long-term treatment of neurotic out-patients in small groups, and this will be my main focus. Marital and family therapy have their own distinctive literatures, while the therapeutic community has been well covered in a previous column (Mandelbrote, 1979).

Group therapy has a short but colourful history, much of it portrayed in a series of classical papers which Rosenbaum and Berger have brought together in their volume *Group Psychotherapy and Group Function* (1975). This collection gives us a fascinating picture of how various pioneering therapists like Joseph Pratt, Cody Marsh, Trigant Burrow and Paul Schilder experimented with the use of the group form. There were, interestingly, some important opponents to these developments. Jung, for example, (pp 202–205) held that psychic disturbance was an individual illness and had to be treated accordingly; although groups were potentially valuable to the *social* human being, individual analysis was the appropriate treatment for the neurotic or psychotic patient. Freud never practised group therapy but was obviously intrigued by the dynamics of groups, and his treatise *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1955) is a brilliant analysis of why people are so strongly inclined to form groups.

Despite their general emphasis on the individual, some psychoanalysts have explored the group as a therapeutic tool. In Britain, the most notable contributions are those of Bion and Foulkes. Bion's classic *Experiences in Groups* (1961) influenced a whole generation of group therapists, particularly at the Tavistock Clinic. This work is not an explicit guide to the prospective group leader but rather an account of the typical obstacles that can impede the group from working at its task. Closely related observations were made by Ezriel (1950), again with the focus on certain basic group processes, with only limited application to actual clinical practice.

The theories of Foulkes (1946) evolved from his experience of working with groups of the military at the Northfield Army Neurosis Unit during the Second World War; he subsequently developed a model of out-patient group therapy for neurotics based on an integration of psychoanalytic and social dynamic principles (chiefly those of Kurt Lewin). This group analytic approach has been generally applied by the Institute of Group Analysis and many psychiatric trainees have been through its teaching programmes. Foulkes was a prolific writer, but a reading of his *Group Analytic Psychotherapy: Method and Principles* (1975) serves as a useful introduction to his ideas.

Numerous books on group therapy in the analytic mode have been written by clinicians practising in the USA. One that I have found eminently readable and illuminating is Helen Durkin's *The Group in Depth* (1964); both theoretical and practical aspects are dealt with. Durkin also has included an excellent summary of the existential approach to group therapy. Perhaps the most distinguished pioneer of analytically-oriented group therapy in the USA is Slavson. His writings, mostly drawn from his clinical experience, are voluminous and scattered but a recent book (1979) conveniently brings together many of his important papers which are well worth a perusal.

In group therapy, as in psychotherapy generally, there are several competing schools, each with its own set of theories and clinical methods. Alongside the psychoanalytically-based approaches is the interpersonalist or interactional school with its chief premise that the sources of change are the group members themselves, including the therapist. Here, Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) is a key influence, particularly his thesis that personality is the product of one's relationships and closely bound up with how one evaluates the appraisals of others. Obviously such notions lend themselves well to the group format. Irvin Yalom's *The Theory and Practice of Group*

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.138.2.167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Psychotherapy (1975) is undoubtedly the most valuable volume of those which centre on this interpersonalist school, and, indeed is *the* book on group therapy that deserves to be in the trainee's personal library. Yalom has succeeded in blending the science and art of psychotherapy by attending equally to the research literature and to careful clinical observation—all this within a humanistic framework. Despite its espousal of a particular approach, the book's comprehensiveness, pragmatism and absence of doctrine enable the reader to obtain a panoramic view of the use of the small group.

Yalom's respect for research is highlighted in another volume which he wrote with Lieberman and Miles. Although their *Encounter Groups: First Facts* (1973) is an account of a study of student volunteers in time-limited encounter-type groups, it remains the most elaborate investigation of both the process and outcome of small-group 'therapy'. One can hope that a study of this scope and elegance might be done on conventional group therapy for psychiatric patients.

By and large, research on therapy groups has been conceptually and methodologically disappointing; perhaps this should not come as a surprise considering the many obstacles *en route* to a high-quality study. The critical review of recent research by Bednar and Kaul (1978) is helpful in providing an idea about what aspects of process and outcome have been well dealt with, and what areas still await satisfactory study.

This review also serves to reinforce the rather tenuous links that exist between researcher and clinician. There is certainly a body of research which gives a pointer to the choice of specific clinical methods. An apt example is the study by Maxmen (1973) in which he showed, through the use of a therapeutic factor questionnaire, that members of short-term in-patient groups valued specific aspects of the group—instillation of hope, altruism, universality and cohesiveness, a quite different constellation from that seen as important by members of long-term out-patient groups. From these findings, among others, Maxmen has devised an 'educative model' of group therapy (1978) which is impressive because it sets out to match the particular needs and goals of patients who are hospitalized for a short period.

The literature on in-patient groups is sparse, making Maxmen's contributions especially noteworthy. They also serve to remind us of what I mentioned at the outset—that groups come in all shapes and sizes—small out-patient, in-patient, large (see for example Kreeger, 1975), self-help such as AA and Weight-Watchers (see for example Robinson, 1978), sensitivity-training, encounter (the brief account by Rogers (1973) is excellent), and many more.

Because of this enormous variety the subject of the group therapies can be quite bewildering to the novice. Fortunately, a recently published book by Stuart Whiteley and John Gordon, *Group Approaches in Psychiatry* (1979) goes a long way to reduce this initial confusion; I also recommend it because of its most useful bibliographical index and suggestions for further reading.

References

BEDNAR, R. L. & KAUL, T. J. (1978) Experiential group research. In *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change* (eds. S. Garfield and A. Bergin). New York: Wiley.

BION, W. R. (1961) *Experiences in Groups*. London: Tavistock.

DURKIN, H. E. (1964) *The Group in Depth*. New York: International Universities Press.

EZRIEL, H. (1950) A psychoanalytic approach to group treatment. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, **23**, 59–74.

FOULKES, S. H. (1975) *Group Analytic Psychotherapy: Method and Principles*. London: Gordon and Breach.

—— (1946) Group analysis in a military neurosis centre. *Lancet*, *i*, 303–10.

FREUD, S. (1921) *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.

KREEGER, L. (ED.) (1975) *The Large Group: Dynamics and Therapy*. London: Constable.

LIEBERMAN, M. A., YALOM, I. D. & MILES, M. B. (1973) *Encounter Groups: First Facts*. New York: Basic Books.

MANDELBROTE, B. M. (1979) Reading about the therapeutic community. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **135**, 369–71.

MAXMEN, J. (1973) Group therapy as viewed by hospitalized patients. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, **28**, 404–8.

—— (1978) An educative model for inpatient group therapy. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, **29**, 321–38.

ROBINSON, D. (1978) Self-help groups. *British Journal of Hospital Medicine*, **20**, 306–11.

ROGERS, C. (1973) *On Encounter Groups*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

ROSENBAUM, M. & BERGER, M. (1975) *Group Psychotherapy and Group Function*. New York: Basic Books.

SLAVSON, S. R. (1979) *Dynamics of Group Psychotherapy*. New York: Jason Aronson.

SULLIVAN, H. S. (1953) *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry*. New York: Norton.

WHITELEY, J. S. & GORDON, J. (1979) *Group Approaches in Psychiatry*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

YALOM, I. D. (1975) *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.

Consultant Psychotherapist, The Warneford Hospital, Oxford OX3 7JX

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.138.2.167 Published online by Cambridge University Press