

Switching Hats: Group Process or Group Therapy. How to assess and utilize the differences.

What type of hat do I bring to this group? Felt fedora, comfortable, worn a lot? Military-like, rule bound? Referee cap? Football helmet where I project my ideas like projectile hitting? Or a hat that keeps my ideas moving, like a hat that you can augment, change the band or add a feather or crease or flip the brim up or down? Or a hat that's pulled down for agendas that are vague or hidden, or, not yet ready to be paraded out. This metaphor suggests the type of hat the leader wears sets the tone for the group dynamics and influences the way people interact. Using your imagination what kind of hat /persona does the puer-puella wear? The synex-? The judge/ persecutor/ shy role? The authoritarian? The mediator? The trickster? The silent one? The seducer? The wise one? The hatless one?

Background:

We train and teach in group situations, for identity, cohesion and as a container for learning. Of course group dynamics occur and it is helpful to think together about the processes that help us differentiate our thinking and feeling, individuate and yet belong.

Our program theme for this Fall 2009 IRS-JA meeting here in St. Louis is "Group Process and Individuation: Is there Wisdom in Groups?"

The Group Psychotherapy Foundation, a philanthropic organization part of the AGPA "is committed to the fact that 'Groups Change Lives' and believes in the power of group interventions to improve people's quality of life."¹ An ambitious goal.

Well, my first formal experience in group therapy was a disaster. People did not talk to one another, no sense of care for one another emerged. It felt toxic. I left vowing never to be part of a group therapy experience again. Ten years later going through one of

life's "rearrangements" I trusted a friend who urged me to join a therapy group. There I experienced a complete difference and I'm sure I was also different; the leader and group members set guidelines and boundaries, verbal tools were given to promote interaction so our abilities developed to look at ourselves in a safe way. In those years I moved into a life changing learning experience involved with both therapy and process groups.

Like many of you I was involved with the teachings of Irving Yalom, Will Schultz, Gestalt groups, Tavistock groups. Later I lead outpatient and in-patient groups in a psychiatric hospital. This later prepared me to lead group therapy and process groups, but I had to tease out the differences, the boundaries, or edges, the purposes and the way we communicate.

First, what is under this hat of Group Process? We've all been involved in task groups. The task is clarified, it is time limited; usually short termed, focused. However, often not much is paid attention to the process, how people feel or the dynamics of the group. Groups organized around topics, may disband after the task, or length of training is over. The membership may revolve over time or continue on an informal basis or regroup.

1. Group Process

Group process can be part of any "task group"; it may facilitate the mission or purpose of the task group. In fact many "task groups" (budget, or curriculum issues) would do well to attend to the process in the group. But many times tending to the process is over ridden because people don't want to deal with feelings and think it will only turn into a therapy group, or someone will be too emotional and influence the group and not get the tasks completed, so they inadvertently or deliberately sabotage the process and stick to the task only, leaving others with unmet feelings about issues. So it will benefit us to think together to review and clarify these differences.

Being and Acting

The leader is clarifies the purpose and the contract, sets the boundaries, clarifies confidentiality constraints. The main goal is to be in the moment, in the here and now: to bring "there and then" material into the present. "How is it happening now in the room?"

One model is for the leader to structure the group in the beginning sessions which can offer enough assistance for safety and low level risk to begin to self-disclose, to bring about engagement, encourage cohesion and risk taking. As the sessions go on the established ways of communicating set the way to carry the process forward. Too much direction by the leader can evoke too much dependency on the leader and the participants may give up their sense of autonomy. Too little direction can leave the participants too anxious, confusion and create a lack of trust.²

A second goal is active listening. Learning how to give and receive feedback and participate in one another's ideas, tasks, and allow another to enter ours in order to hone our skills to listen, watch and respond with compassion, empathy and or effectiveness.

Questions such as the following help us become aware of our process: How do I affect the other person in the group? They, me? What are the emotional effects of the process among participants. How do I regulate or moderate my feelings and ideas? How do I enter into the group? How can I maintain my individuality, claim it and not be pressured by the group? How do I belong in this group? What are the tasks we are to do? Is it a group where the individual is not heard, are we as concerned about the dynamics of the group on the individual as those of the individual on the group members?

In my experience the use of process oriented learning/information in a class grounded in the present moment brings about a very different learning style of my feelings and thoughts and my effect on others and they on me, than done only in a one to one situation. We look for the patterns of communication, of influence, the roles that emerge, who leads, who defers, and how conflict is handled.

2. Group Therapy

The group leader clarifies the contract for the group. Sets the time limits, fee, etc., especially the confidentiality contract, and the emotional boundaries of what is permissible and not in the way of behavior. The task to focus individuals' work on their own individual psychotherapeutic issues in the context of projections and transferences to one another and to the leader. The leader may

interact with one person at a time or facilitate the members to work together.

A leader is the focal point person at the beginning who teaches and monitors the verbal and nonverbal messages that seem to be present. He/She guides awareness of the expectations, anxieties, the hopes, the models of interactions³ which facilitate ways to be and work in the group. And the leader clarifies his/her understanding of psychodynamics, i. e. what model is being used? Is it cognitive behavior, or of attachment styles⁴ or character styles? Developmental, archetypal? The leader and members facilitate/model ways to give feedback, how information is processed and how to work with the transference and counter-transference. Like the analytic couple, what happens in the group, the group dynamics, emerge and change⁵ but are different than one to one work. The group has its own integrity as well.

Hinshelwood⁶ reviews Bion's earlier theory of groups, "group mentality," "valency," and "basic assumptions" that were conceived before Bion was in analytically training and shows Bion's attempt to bridge what he saw the very real differences of group psychology and individual psychology. But the development of Bion's work in the 70's after Bion's analytic training pointed to a development of a theory of group "containment" on many levels. Hinshelwood sees group work as having the possibility for containing "the intolerable experiences of the individual members...." The containment is thought to be among the "linkages that go on between the minds of the group members" as well as with the therapist. I would add that I believe this also means the intuitive and emotional links that occur in a good enough working group. Hinshelwood "conceptualized groups as arenas which dramatized the externalized conflicts of individuals"

p. 287. *ibid*

He suggests three types of group containment: One, "flexible containment" where members "can tolerate each others' emotions" learning that the projections are recognized and accepted as such. Second, a "defensive container", the members cut across one another, talk a lot, but not really communicating. Words are used for effect, but members are not really relating. Third, a "fragile

container”, the members do not feel safe and anxieties judgments fly and mistrust runs high. Pg. 288f.

So to recap: both group process and group therapy provide a way to:

- 1) explore different perspectives of interacting
- 2) see what shared experience we can draw from what is clearly different and what meaning we make of the differences.
- 3) change perspectives, to understand that unconscious reactions occur and that our projections/transferences affect everyone,
- 4) change how we deal with those reactions, respond in a new way
a chance for the transcendent function to emerge.
- 5) offer tools of the verbal and non-verbal cues to “read” ourselves and others- learn to give and receive feed back.
 - a) listen to voice, to pitch, attitude of delivery, moves,
 - b) listen to the words, how we understand, or believe or allow us
 - c) see, watch our body’s responses to what we see and hear, to ground in the affective response, the complex , body language,
 - d) articulate feelings, thoughts, disjointed, able to struggle
 - e) validate the person’s experience.

Addressing and working through our compulsion, jealousy, envy, anger, shame, joy, ebullience, excitement depression, the affective experience of our complexes, our affect regulation , is a high goal in analysis and supervision. We have committed to continue our endeavor to be present to ourselves and others in how we manage these affects, how we behave and feel and think on a daily basis.

As Jung suggested the ability to reflect is one of the “instincts” he valued highly.⁷ Now our thinking includes talking about “mindfulness” or the process to mentalize,⁸ to bring our present awareness of our feelings and thoughts/ our complexes as we deal with one another and with ourselves into the present.

Developing resilience is a goal. There is a whole body of research on what makes people withstand extraordinary stress and respond with

resilience to complex trauma and family trauma. At the February 2009 AGPA meeting in Chicago the theme was Developing Resilience in Groups.⁹ What makes our group resilient?

3. Analytic Learning - Seminar Groups

The purpose for teaching or learning in groups often produces very favorable synergy among of the members working together either on behalf of themselves or for the purpose as defined by the group. And that's what we do. We teach and learn and we often supervise in groups.

How do we approach the task and process of training in our seminars or training institutes? This commitment presents many types of formal and informal groups where we wear many hats that we switch from one kind of group to another group. Values and norms emerge and it is helpful to think of how we shape these and how they shape us.

- a. learning/teaching group situations: new information, - hat of authority or sharing information
- b. clinical application of analytical psychology, from our own analysis to group or individual consultation/ supervision, - a hat that we begin to wear showing many sides of complexes and developing new ways of feeling and thinking,
- c. relating to colleagues, swapping hats with one another,
- d. relating to the power differential in class, analysis, supervision, and the shadow of this dynamic, what is under our hats we do not expose
- e. the power dynamics of exams, evaluations, - the hats of the examiners may be more formal, wanting us as candidates to focus on our knowledge base and demonstrate our clinical application, as well as our comportment. As analysts are we puer, over-achievers, in a "mother" or a "father" roll with our analysand, enablers?
- f. the tasks of teachers/leaders/ candidates around issues of assessments: professional comportment, and ethical considerations, knowledge base, - the mutual feelings that emerge with the appropriate and professional persona, and taking personal responsibility;
- g. collegial opportunities for socializing, networking, gossiping

all configure in the complexity of training.- here the hat of the trickster, the friend, the rival, the enabler, the judge, all emerge.

For our purposes, for training work committees with candidates coming into that group this dynamic works differently. We ask ourselves, how does the group prepare to receive the candidate? When do we review information, or go over the focus of the group? Who initiates leadership, may share leadership, facilitate guidance? How does the group come together? To connect/bond? To focus on the issues at hand? What are the group member's responsibilities?

The stages of group development that you are aware of include:

- a. the initial stage of acquaintance, may be awkward to come together until a sense of belonging and working together develops,
- b. the stage of affiliation and sense of familiarity,
- c. the stage of issues of control naturally emerge and how does the group deal with disagreements, conflict, power and boundaries, and
- d. the stage of working through to a place of understanding, and hopefully, resolution,
- e. the termination stage. – which many groups avoid, and avoid the grief work or working through that to the mourning process and internalization of the meaning of that experience.
- f. Since there is an ongoing experience after the candidate phase: How do we include new analysts into the larger analytic community?

Now let's look at our working groups in InterRegional.

They are a "hybrid": a group of analysts convene for a particular task and process: the candidate comes into that already formed group. This sets up an "us and them" which, hopefully, can be addressed among ourselves. It is a group power dynamic.

It parallels the analysand coming into the setting of the therapist, of the unknown to the known, the power dynamics are uneven, of course. It has to be monitored and sometimes a participant observer can offer helpful feedback.

4. Reflections

As group leaders for any working group the Admission Committee, Ethics Committee, Review Committees, Exam Committees,

a) Do we gather the members and spend time together beforehand to have a chance to focus as a group, to clarify the issues and the tasks?

b) What are the process issues to be aware of? (The feeling in the room? The tone, etc. what is being understood, misunderstood, how to address the unspoken, unfelt aspects. What is not being said or mentioned?) All the while some affective process is going on, either negatively or positively or neutrally felt among us. How does this affect the proceedings.

c) Do we take time out to learn how our beliefs and language affect each other in the process of evaluating?

d) So what are the limitations of the purpose of this particular group, say the exam committee? Or of the members? A group process group is not a therapy group. An exam group is not a process group, yet there are tasks that bring out feelings and thinking. And how does the committee deal with this? What has been agreed upon among the examining members? A Review Committee is not a therapy group, yet the way issues are handled, the person may feel some intervention, positively or negatively or experience a comment as helpful, clarifying or therapeutic. What is it we want to accomplish?

e) What do candidates need from us? What do they want?

What do analysts need/ want from candidates? What is it we are trying to support, assess, evaluate?

5. Disruptive elements happen.

It is important to think together how we utilize the disruptive elements that occur in groups. Possibly they may be used toward a new sense of who we are, how we work together. How do we use stale, dead or toxic elements, carried from split off projections, or complexes that seem intractable and make them useful or benign? Many of us give up without some wisdom or template of group work.

Kenneth Eisold has written about the difficulty of translating our one to one work as analysts to working together in a group.¹⁰ How do we change from the insular office work of analysis to group work, from one to one, to group consensus building? As Lewin, Bion and

Foulkes, Yalom, and vast array of others have shared the group dynamics are very different. Yet as analyst we bring some overlap of our skills in listening, intuiting what is not said, reading between the lines, empathy, and compassion. And most importantly we bring our skills of helplessness, and not knowing, of uncertainty and ambiguity for and risk of something new that may emerge to benefit us all.

Suzy Spradlin, Jean Kirsch, Sam Kimbles, among others have lead process groups for years in the San Francisco Institute. Sam and Tom Singer have led the discussion about the cultural complexes that affect our group work. And I recommend Kimbles' article "Cultural Complexes and the Transmission of Group Trauma in Everyday Life."¹¹

There are powerful influences of informal groups, verbal and nonverbal, that give agreement or dissent, inside or outside formal groups. We comment, ask information from a colleague, set tones of feelings and judgments, communicate nonverbally - we give one another verbal and nonverbal emotional information that can be understood or at times greatly misunderstood. In a formal process group or therapy group these shadow elements or neglected feelings or thoughts need emerge to be brought out to find appropriate expression.

6. My group - the in group: some in-group biases.

In our collective training seminars and institutes, I think of important research that helps us understand some of our group tendencies: In the research by Marilyn Brewer she theorizes that "social identity is regulated by opposing drives for belonging and differentiation that motivate social identification with distinctive groups that satisfy both needs simultaneously."¹² Once again we hold the tension.

She challenged a definition of ethnocentrism (Sumner's definition of ethnocentrism)

- a. Also in the literature of social psychology is the natural idea that we organize ourselves into the in-group/out-group categories.
- b. As we value our group we value those in it as well.
- c. We tend to see out group as better than the out group.

- d. we may view the out-groups with antagonism, or mutual disregard.

But Brewer has found that an in-group bias does not necessarily lead to the conclusion of the last point, d, that we regard the out group with aspersion or denigration.

She suggests that security motives, loyalty and preference are the basis for group identity, and that out of this grounding grows the experience of personal and collective self enhancement, and motives for belonging. She writes, “social collectives must be restricted to some optimal size sufficiently large and inclusive to realize the advantages of extended cooperation, but sufficiently exclusive to avoid the disadvantages of spreading social interdependence too thin.”

She offers four points for group development. 1. Find the optimal group size and 2. assess what are the human social motives that are met, which are two sides to this balancing act. 3. For we need to belong and be included. And, 4. the critical point to consider: we also have a need for differentiation from others within the group as well as without.

“As group membership becomes more and more inclusive, the need for inclusion is satisfied but the need for differentiation is activated... the two opposing motives produce an emergent characteristic – the capacity for social identification with distinctive groups that satisfy both needs simultaneously.”

In conclusion:

This brings us to an essential ideal of a group sense of resiliency: what is the optimum size for a group to balance its task and function to wear the hats of inclusion and of differentiation? Our task? To hold the tension of these opposites. What hat(s) do we wear for the task group, in a group process, and what do we wear in group therapy? Finally how do we balance the various hats we wear in this training society? The “hybrid” of group work? I invite us all to continue to discuss these and other ideas about our work together.

In the resources that Pat Berry suggested for us in considering this program, I read the book, The Power of Collective Wisdom.¹³ Briefly I'd like to tell you the story of Paula Underwood, clan mother of the

Turtle clan, of the Iroquois nation. A woman who shares her insights about the people's stories and wisdom of a group. Her father taught her to listen to others as he talked with them, so she could know the stories of her people. She became able to repeat nearly word for word what the person shared, one kind of wisdom; then he asked her to listen to the heart to the speaker and as a child she would put her ear up to their chests; then he asked her to listen between the words to what was going on. This guided her to an attentive and deep listening, a listening to what is said "between the words" those affective places that need to become conscious. We are all challenged to look at what makes a hat of wisdom for our clans.

Endnotes:

¹ <http://www.agpa.org/stdnt/gpfshawds.html>

2 Johnson, Chad V., Ph.D. "A Process-Oriented Group Model for University Students: A Semi-Structured Approach." Oct. 2009. International Journal of Group Psychotherapy. NY: Guilford Press. 59 (4) Pp.511-528.

3 Wallin, David J. 2007. Attachment in Psychotherapy. NY: The Guilford Press.

4 Dougherty, Nancy, and West, Jacqueline. 2007. The Matrix and Meaning of Character: An Archetypal and Developmental Approach. NY: Taylor and Francis.

5 Marmarose, cheri L., Ph.d. "Multiple Attachments and Group Psychotherapy: Implications for College Counseling Centers. Oct. 2009. International Journal of Group Psychotherapy. NY: Guilford Press. 59 (4) 2009. pp. 461-490.

6 Hinshelwood, R. D. 2008. "Group Therapy as Psychic Containing." International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 58 (3) 2008. p. 283-302.

7 Jung, C. G., 1981. "Psychological Factors in Human Behaviour." The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche. NY: Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. par. 241. Also, important to consider is the early contribution of Alfred Adler's which focused on the relationship of the person and the social system.

8 Allen, Jon G., and Peter Fonagy. 2006. Handbook of Mentalization-Based Treatment. Hoboken, NY: John Wiley and Sons Inc.

9 Kim Anderson, PHD., has written Enhancing Resilience in Survivors of Family Violence Ph.D. (forthcoming).

10 Eisold, Kenneth. "Institutional conflicts in Jungian Analysis." Journal of Analytical Psychology. 2001. 46-335-353.

11 Kimbles, Samuel L. "Cultural Complexes and the Transmission of Group Traumas in Everyday Life." Psychological Perspectives 49:96-110, 2006. Los Angeles.

12 Brewer, Marilyn. Nov. 2007. "The Importance of Being We: Human Nature and Intergroup Relations." Ohio State University. American Psychologist. Pg. 728-738.

13 Briskin, Alan, Sheryl Erickson, John Ott, Tom Callanan. 2009. The Power of Collective Wisdom and the Trap of Collective Folly. San Francisco: Gerrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. P. 40f.
