

The Scientific Study of Groups: An Editorial

In 1921 Morton Prince and Floyd Allport renamed the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology and Social Psychology*. They argued that no clear line separates the normal from the abnormal, that investigators in basic and applied fields study the same personal and interpersonal processes, that basic researchers could profit from the study of dysfunction, and that basic science had much to offer those interested in application. They sought, therefore, to create "a unified dynamic psychology which, in time, will overarch the divisions of mental science drawn merely in terms of subject matter or in terms of schools of thought" (G. W. Allport, 1949, p. 439).

Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice applies Prince and Allport's dream of a unified science of human behavior to one specific subset of that domain: groups. *Group Dynamics* recognizes that the scientific field devoted to the analysis of groups and fields that solve personal, interpersonal, and social problems with and through groups have always been intertwined. When clinicians first proposed group techniques in the early decades of this century, they grounded their work in the psychology and social psychology of groups. Moreno's (1932) method of psychodrama, for example, sprang from his studies of the sociometric structures of small groups. Consultants who replaced Taylor's (1911) scientific management methods with more modern motivational, managerial, and organizational systems based their innovations on early studies of groups and organizations (Bird, 1940; Park & Burgess, 1924). When psychoanalytic therapists began to work in groups, they drew on Freud's (1922) largely theoretical rebuttal of the ideas offered by crowd theorist Le Bon (1960). And it was Kurt Lewin (1936) who set the standard for combining basic science with application, for he could lay claim to two titles: founder of the scientific field of group dynamics and inventor of the workshop and skill-building seminar.

This shared ancestry, however, has yet to inform fully the scientific analysis of groups or the application of change methods in group and organizational contexts. Bednar and Kaul (1978), after systematically reviewing studies of interpersonal learning groups, are positive about current group methods but negative about the quality of research carried out in applied domains. Klein (1983) notes that group therapy is insulated from the social psychology of groups. Guzzo and Shea (1992) describe a gap between basic studies of groups and applications in organizational contexts. When I recently reviewed a collection of works dealing with applications of social psychology to group therapy and mental health, I was forced to conclude that "the bridge between social psychology and mental health is still too weak to traverse" (Forsyth, 1993, p. 932).

Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice seeks to revitalize the link between the scientific study of group dynamics and the application of that scientific understanding in applied settings—particularly those settings involving deliberate attempts to help individuals achieve desired personal and interpersonal change. To accomplish this goal I will publish the highest quality theoretical, empirical, and practical articles dealing with groups in general and therapeutic groups in particular. As the journal of Division 49 of the American Psychological

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Association (Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy), it is dedicated to the Division's basic mission (American Psychological Association, 1996, p. 23):

1. Discovery of new knowledge in group dynamics theory and research applications;
2. Empirical investigations of group dynamics applications;
3. Encouragement of creativity in the development of new theories, investigative methods, and practice in group dynamics applications;
4. Education and training in group dynamics applications;
5. Development of guidelines and standards for training and independent practice in group dynamics applications;
6. Outcome studies of the efficacy of group dynamics applications.

The Unificationist Philosophy

The phrase *group dynamics* in the title requires explanation, for its legacy is rich. The phrase has, for example, been used to describe the group-mind-like processes once thought to emerge in groups (Slavson, 1957) or a wholly research-based approach to groups (Teicher, 1996). But Kurt Lewin and his students used the phrase in a much broader sense, referring not to any specific theoretical or therapeutic perspective, but to that "field of inquiry dedicated to advancing knowledge about the nature of groups, the laws of their development, and their interrelations with individuals, other groups, and larger institutions" (Cartwright & Zander, 1960, p. 7). Indeed, the journal's philosophy is rooted in Lewin's concept of *action research*. Lewin felt that social problems, including conflict, leadership, and adjustment, should be solved scientifically, for there "is no hope of creating a better world without a deeper scientific insight into the function of leadership and culture" and other essentials of group life (Lewin, 1948, p. 113). Lewin's action research argues against the traditional distinction between basic and applied science by suggesting that scientific understanding will occur most rapidly if researchers' and practitioners' efforts are unified. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* puts Lewin's unificationist view into practice by opening its pages to anyone interested in groups, regardless of educational training, discipline, methodological preferences, theoretical background, or professional identity (Forsyth & Leary, 1991).

Topics and Contexts

No single discipline holds the exclusive rights to the study of groups. Scientists in such fields as psychology, sociology, social psychology, anthropology, speech and communication, political science, business, education, and psychiatry examine the nature of groups, and *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* publishes articles by scholars in all of these fields. Indeed, I hope that in time the field of group dynamics will become so unified that such distinctions as field versus laboratory work, basic versus applied research, or group-as-a-whole approaches versus individualistic approaches no longer arbitrarily influence our appraisal of the work. I expect, however, that manuscripts will fall into three categories: those dealing with social psychological processes operating in groups, those dealing with groups in organizations, and those dealing with groups as mechanisms for achieving and sustaining psychological and physical well-being. In the realm of social psychology, I welcome manuscripts dealing with such topics as affiliation, communication, decision making, group socialization, intergroup relations, norms, roles, and structure. In the realm of organization behavior, I seek articles dealing with topics such as management and leadership, productivity, organizational stress and health, organizational development, team building, and team composition. I also welcome articles dealing with

health-related processes, broadly defined to include traditional forms of group psychotherapy, self-help groups, groups that provide individuals with social support, family dynamics, and interpersonal learning groups. I therefore seek articles that examine groups in a range of contexts, including ad hoc groups in experimental settings, therapy groups, naturally forming friendship groups and cliques (e.g., gangs), organizational units (e.g., performance teams), self-help groups (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous), and learning groups (e.g., workshops).

Types of Articles

Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice will primarily publish empirical analyses of group processes: I assume that all conceptual analyses of groups, no matter how intellectually alluring, must be tested with procedures that meet the field's scientific standards (Seligman, 1996). The journal also seeks theoretical and review papers that are outstanding in terms of scholarship and significance for the field. Theory papers and literature reviews should meet the standards set by such journals as *Psychological Review* and *Psychological Bulletin*. *Group Dynamics* also publishes brief reports, such as single-experiment studies that do not require extensive theoretical introduction, case studies, reports of therapeutic innovations, and theoretical commentaries about specific issues. All works to be accepted for publication must extend psychologists' understanding of groups significantly beyond our current level of knowledge, and these contributions to the body of knowledge must be highlighted in the articles.

Authors, in keeping with the spirit of action research, should discuss the wider implications of their findings beyond the contexts they study. Authors should discuss the implications of their findings for change-promoting groups even when their work focuses primarily on basic topics. Similarly, authors of articles describing innovative therapeutic practices should examine the theoretical foundations and empirical findings that provide substantiation for the techniques.

The Importance of Theory

Group dynamicists include both basic research scientists and applications-oriented individuals who work with groups in industrial, organizational, educational, judiciary, and therapeutic contexts. We take as given, however, Kurt Lewin's dictum: There is nothing so practical as a good theory. Even when their pursuits are guided by primarily practical questions, such as Why, despite their heterogeneity in terms of purposes and procedures, do groups promote physical and mental well-being? or Why don't members of work groups recognize and expel their least competent members?, investigators must nonetheless develop a general theoretical orientation that would be of interest to group dynamicists. Basic researchers, too, must develop theories and conduct empirical studies that seek to account for phenomena of interest to practitioners. Researchers are quick to remind practitioners that a good theory is useful, but Lewin also insisted that psychologists must strive to develop theories that can be used to solve important social and psychological problems. A manuscript's theoretical sufficiency will be of paramount importance in the editorial decision-making processes. I seek studies that add, unequivocally, to the stock of knowledge about groups.

A Final Plea for United Action

Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, with its unabashedly eclectic methodological, theoretical, and disciplinary editorial policy, hopes to advance the current knowledge of groups and their dynamics. Groups are studied by a range of investigators in a host of different disciplines—all of whom have differing goals, pursuits, and paradigms. I hope in this journal to synthesize these

varying perspectives, however, in a unified approach to the study of groups. Despite differences in outlook, all students of groups recognize that they are essential to human life. Through membership in groups people define and confirm their values and beliefs and take on or refine a social identity. When individuals face uncertain situations, groups can offer reassurance about those problems and security in companionship. In groups people learn about relations with others, the type of impressions they make on others, and the way they can relate with others more effectively. Given the central importance of groups, group dynamicists must accept the charge of developing more elaborate conceptualizations of groups that take into account both their change-producing properties and their properties as groups per se. We must take seriously the action researcher's creed and apply it to understand groups (Forsyth, 1988):

*Knowledge does not prosper,
When science is one-sided.
The basic and applied must be
United, not divided.*

———Donelson R. Forsyth, Editor

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