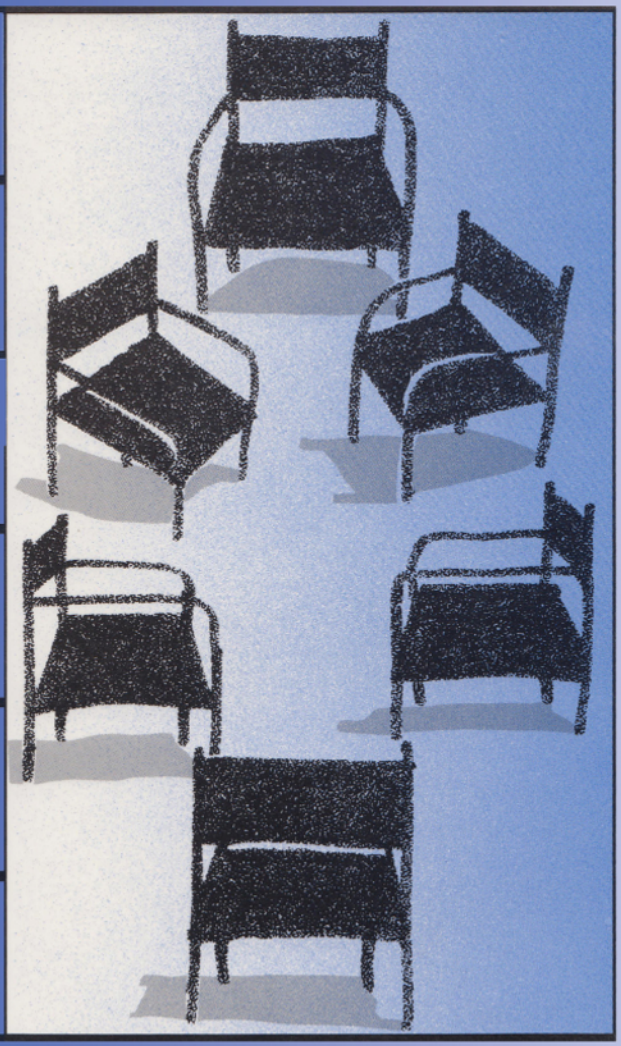
Models for Change in Social Group Work



Marian F. Fatout

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IN
SOCIAL GROUP WORK

MODERN APPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL WORK

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Marian F. Fatout

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About the Author

Marian F. Fatout received her M.S.W. and D.S.W. from the University of Southern California. She is currently an Associate Professor in the School of Social Work, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is a member of the National Association of Social Workers, the Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups and the Council on Social Work Education.

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Preface

Social work with groups is an ever expanding area of practice. It is a unique, exciting, dynamic way to help people make the changes in their lives that they themselves desire. Groups are used effectively by social workers today to help people of all ages and all walks of life enhance their social functioning and to cope more effectively with their problems. Group workers are involved in all fields of social work practice and are to be found in mental health, family counseling, child welfare, geriatrics, substance abuse, correctional, and many other settings. They are critically important members of clinical teams attempting to respond to serious mental and emotional social problems. They also work in nonclinical settings in which they seek to foster social growth and enhanced social integration. They work in children's, youth, and community settings and are integral to community-based programs that seek to facilitate community cohesiveness and more effective community-based responses to social need.

Group work is as old as social work itself. The group work approach emerged in the late nineteenth century as social work was taking initial steps to define its role and to gain recognition as a new profession. Together with social casework, group work was quickly recognized as an effective method of responding to human need and of fostering social functioning. The Settlement House movement played a critical role in the evolution and formulation of group work as a recognized method of social work; however, the antecedents of the group work method are much older and can be found in religious and secular movements that attempted to organize and educate people and provide opportunities for them to meet and exchange ideas and experiences.

Indeed, the historical development of group work is rooted in the historical evolution of the United States and other Western democratic countries. It conveys many of the values of society, such as the democratic process and respecting and valuing the uniqueness of each individual. It makes use of the small group as an agent of change and promotes the idea of mutual aid as an important element in daily life.

As group work was being formalized in social work, other professionals were also evolving approaches for working with groups. Some were focused on particular client groups or problem areas. These models seem to have real potential for assisting social workers in helping their clients to meet needs.

As a result of the historical context within which group work developed in social work, many ideas and notions evolved about how, why, and with whom this methodology could be used. Some believed that groups should be used primarily as a preventive method to work with children and young people from poor neighborhoods who were at risk of becoming involved in crime and other forms of antisocial behavior. Others thought that the developmental implications of group work should be emphasized so that groups would be seen as a microcosm of social living in which people could improve their social skills, enhance social functioning, and learn how to interact more effectively with others. Yet another view was that social work with groups would be most effective in treatment settings such as mental hospitals, correctional facilities, and other agencies where clients with serious problems could be helped to solve their difficulties.

There were also significant differences of opinion about which theoretical approaches or models should govern group work practice. At the time that group work emerged, its theoretical foundations were weak and most group workers operated in a pragmatic fashion without drawing on conceptual notions. This resulted in a plethora of approaches being developed in social work. At first there were attempts to resolve these differences by accepting the idea that social work with groups could include many different theoretical approaches and that workers could select which one to use. This was not found to be a satisfactory resolution of the situation.

The problem was also felt in schools of social work where future group workers were being trained for professional practice. Should the instructors use only one theoretical approach and stress only one application of group work method or should students be exposed to a variety of different approaches. If a variety of approaches is used, does this confuse students or enhance their knowledge of the wide diversity of models available?

There are no simple answers to these questions. Many group workers perceive the plurality of ideas in social group work as a weakness in its progress, but others use this diversity to broaden and strengthen the method. Attempts have been made to integrate these differences from time to time, usually with little success. There were attempts to synthesize these models by combining them or organizing them in some

fashion. These attempts often were not found to be acceptable to the profession generally. Finally, the "mainstream model" was identified and elaborated by Catherine Papell and Beulah Rothman. The "mainstream model" is an attempt to reintegrate the diversity of approaches in social work by using commonalties in core concepts. The concepts that they identified as being essential to working with groups and consistent with the values and ethics of social work were the group, the member in the group, the activities of the group, and the worker with the group.

Although there are still many differences of opinion on the question of the usefulness of different models in group work today, many group workers now believe that it is possible to identify the major commonalties among models that have developed in social work with groups. The mainstream model does offer the prospect of integrating many different approaches in social group work and it is only as this integration of approaches is accomplished that one can begin to develop an eclectic model for practice based on sound social work values and principles. It is desirable that such an integrated model be developed. Because human beings present such a broad array of problems and needs, it is essential that practitioners prepare themselves with as much knowledge and with as many skills as possible. A unifying framework such as the "mainstream model" can be used to integrate the many components necessary for practice.

To develop an eclectic model for practice it is essential to have an inclusive grasp of the approaches, their values, purposes, knowledge base, sanction, and methodology. Only after these things are known and understood can the practitioner make a meaningful selection of those elements that can be useful in helping the group members to change. In addition to understanding the models, the practitioner must also possess a level of skill adequate to utilize the selected techniques for practice.

The intent of this book is to help social work students and practitioners develop a sound base of practice for social work with groups. It does so by seeking to describe the major models for change in group work available today. Various models, ranging from the *gestalt* to the neurolinguistic approaches, are described. Each chapter examines the historical roots of the model, as well as its theoretical principles, practice application, and effectiveness. The final chapter discusses the "mainstream model" and the prospects of developing an eclectic approach for effective practice. After acquiring a solid foundation in these different group work approaches, suggestions are made concerning factors to consider in the selection of appropriate forms of intervention.

Outline of the Book

The book is divided into three parts: Part I consists of one chapter, which serves as an introduction to group work, a historic overview of the field, and a brief discussion of the "mainstream model" and its characteristics. The chapter shows that the ideas underlying modern social group work practice are not new; indeed, as was suggested earlier, they have their roots in Western democratic beliefs and in community and popular activities. It also shows that modern group work principles emerged as the needs of people in society were being met. The ideas and beliefs did not just "spring up," but rather gradually came together and were recognized as being basic to work with groups. The attempt to develop a unified theory of working with groups is discussed, which then led to the development of the "mainstream model."

Part II consists of seven chapters (Chapters 2–8), each of which describes a particular model of group work that developed outside the profession of social work. These chapters reviews the major theoretical models that are currently available in the field including Person-Centered Group Work, the Behavioral Approach, Gestalt Therapy, Transactional Analysis, Reality Therapy, Positive Peer Culture, and the Neurolinguistic Approach. Each chapter provides a historical background and pays particular attention to the persons who were primarily responsible for the development of the model. This "biographic" approach has been chosen deliberately in an attempt to make the material come alive and to help link concepts to real people and events. A special effort is made in each chapter to summarize the theoretical ideas underlying each model in simple, easily comprehensible terms. Often simple ideas are obfuscated in complex jargon-ridden language that not only makes it difficult for students to understand concepts and principles but hinders effective incorporation of theory into professional practice. In describing theoretical principles, the relevance for practice is clearly outlined. Finally each model is evaluated in terms of its strengths and weaknesses and potential usefulness to the practitioner. Ultimately, however, practitioners must decide which models are most effective and best suited to their needs.

Part III consists of one concluding chapter, which suggests how the practitioner can begin to make decisions about the different models and about the different strategies, procedures, and techniques that may be most effective in helping the client to change. It summarizes the components of the "mainstream model" and analyzes the approaches described in previous chapters in terms of their fit with the primary

characteristics essential to that model. Other means of making effective decisions in regard to procedures to be used with groups are recognized and discussed.

Acknowledgments

Over the years many people have contributed and helped to shape my ideas and attitudes about working with groups. As a practicing group worker, I especially value the various things I learned from supervisors such as Romaine Edwards, John H. Jones, and the late Louise M. Larsen. Appreciation also goes to the many groups with whom I have worked and from whom I have learned, especially those at Neighborhood Youth Association under the direction of Margaret Mudgett.

Certainly I have been greatly influenced by my contacts with Helen Northen as an educator. I have been inspired by her dedication and commitment to the development of social work practice with groups and by her warmth and generosity in working with students.

Finally, I owe much gratitude to Dean James Midgley of the School of Social Work, Louisiana State University, for his patience, support, and assistance regarding this manuscript. Last, but not least, I thank the many group work students with whom I have interacted who have helped me to formulate some of my concepts and ideas.

Marian Fatout
Louisiana State University

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PART I

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CHAPTER 1

Social Work with Groups: An Introduction

Group work is a modality for bringing about change either in the environment or in the member's intrapersonal or interpersonal relationships. "Social group work uses the group approach to accomplish the goals common to all social work activities: (1) to prevent members from developing dysfunctional ways of coping with their situations; (2) to enhance members' engagement in and use of artistic, social, intellectual, and other endeavors; and (3) to rehabilitate members who have developed handicaps in their social and personal functioning" (Garvin, 1981, p. 3).

In social work the unit of service can be an individual, a subgroup, a group, or a larger collectivity. In this book the unit of service of focus is the group. Eubank (1932, p. 163) states that "a group is two or more persons in a relationship of psychic interaction, whose relationships with one another may be abstracted and distinguished from their relationships with all others so that they might be thought of as an entity." The particular type of group utilized is the small group, usually composed of five to nine persons. The reason for stating the number of members is that it is believed to be very important that every person be able to relate directly and engage every other member in the group, face to face. The group is viewed as a system, that is, the member and group are so interrelated that the condition of either affects the other. Not only is the group affected by the members it also is influenced by the environment in which it exists, as well as affecting that environment.

A major factor in group dynamics is that of mutual aid. It is believed that people grow and change as they relate to others, both in receiving and in giving help. A part of this process recognizes that everyone not only can take from but also has something very important to contribute to others. Over the years many practitioners and researchers have been involved in attempting to identify the specific forces that are released by

this mutual aid process (Corsini & Rosenberg, 1955; Goldstein, 1981; Marks, 1956; Northen, 1982; Yalom, 1970, 1975). Northen (1988) summarizes these forces as follows:

1. Mutual support. When members are supportive of each other and receive additional support from the social worker, a climate is created in which members are able to express themselves and try out new thoughts and behaviors.
2. Cohesiveness. This dynamic results from the members developing affective ties with each other. A commitment to the group and to each other results from this force.
3. Relationships. The optimum condition to help members change requires a blend of support and challenge.
4. Universalization. The member discovers that he/she is not the only person who is feeling or behaving in this manner. There is solace in knowing that one is not alone.
5. Instillation of hope. In groups there are opportunities to relate to others who may be more optimistic and, in fact, may have accomplished some very important tasks and goals. The group as a whole, with the help of the worker, may convey some very positive expectations for the members.
6. Altruism. A great deal of self-esteem results from the member becoming aware that he/she does have something of value to give to others, whether it is a suggestion, the description of an experience, or simply support and concern.
7. Gaining knowledge and skills. The group provides opportunities to learn from others and to try new ways of thinking and behaving in a safe environment.
8. Catharsis. Ventilation of feelings and exposing ones ideas to others who are accepting frees energy so that the member can continue to work toward the desired changes.
9. Corrective emotional experiences. The group setting allows the member to correct earlier dysfunctional relationships by providing a primary group experience in which the person can reexperience and correct ways of feeling about and relating to significant others. Often this is accomplished by working through transferences with the worker or with other members. Transferences result when the member perceives another in the group as being like a significant other that they had experienced earlier in their life.
10. Reality testing. Groups provide a setting in which the members can test and compare their perceptions and feelings. This process promotes validation or corrections of distortions in perceptions.

11. Parameter and pressure of group membership. The expectations and norms of the group help the member to function within certain limits, often allowing him/her to reduce resistance to authority, accept necessary limitations, and behave in a manner acceptable to others.

Even after a discussion of the overall purpose of social work with groups, the more specific purposes, definitions, and descriptions of small groups and a brief discussion of mutual aid and the specific dynamic forces that are involved, it is believed that group work can best be understood by referring to its history.

Historical Context

The historical development of group work was a very distinct and unique process differing markedly from the emerging work with groups in other professions, such as psychology and psychiatry. An appreciation of the evolution of work with this system, which later officially became a part of social work, gives perspective in regard to the potential breadth of client populations and problems for which the group can be utilized.

The Industrial Revolution began in the United States in the mid-1800s and resulted in major social changes. In addition, there were shifts of large populations from rural to urban areas and immigration from Europe, Mexico, and Asia. This led to new social problems for the individual and for the broader society. People who had worked on farms and were accustomed to working many hours a day were now employed by factories for a designated number of hours. In the city, even though they worked many hours per day, they found themselves with leisure time to be filled. In many cases they did not have the skills essential to perform the jobs. Women were beginning to join the labor force and had to be trained and supported in these endeavors. It was important for immigrants to learn the language and new ways of living in order to function and compete with the rest of the population. Children, as well as women and men, became a part of the work force. Child labor laws had not yet been passed and children were often required to work 15 to 18 hours a day 7 days a week.

Some of the societal problems resulting from these major industrial changes were overcrowding, unhealthy living conditions, and deteriorating neighborhoods. Labor problems were developing as immigrants accepted jobs for lesser pay. Within this atmosphere of social and economic upheaval, organizations using groups developed to ameliorate

some of these conditions. There were several major strands of expansion that seem especially significant to the evolution of group work.

Programs usually referred to as "character building" were soon founded. In 1851 the Young Men's Christian Association was organized with the purpose "to improve the spiritual condition of young men in the drapery and trades" (Wilson, 1976, p. 6). The Young Women's Christian Association was organized in 1866 and offered spiritual and social support as well as classes to learn skills such as typewriting. Other "character-building organizations" such as The Girl's Friendly Society of the United States, the Boy's Clubs of America, Boy Scouts of America, and Girl Scouts were some of these developing national organizations. Schwartz (1971) suggests that these character-building agencies grew from the belief that small face-to-face groups could restore opportunities for the good life taken by the post-Civil War industrialization.

Another major thrust to deal with the problems experienced by individuals and society was the introduction of the settlement house to the United States. Patterned after Toynbee Hall in London, the Neighborhood Guild was established on the lower east side of New York in 1886. The idea of settlement houses spread rapidly and many were established by 1900. Probably the most widely known of these was Jane Addam's Hull House in Chicago in 1889.

The use of the term "settlement house" is very significant and purposeful. In London, the idea for these institutions came from a clergyman and a group of others who were looking for ways to help people who lived in a particular community. They decided they could give the most assistance by moving into a neighborhood and becoming neighbors to those around them, and so they located a house and "settled in" among the people they were serving. A unique characteristic of this method of giving help was that the workers concentrated "on the total problems of a single geographic area" (Pumphrey & Pumphrey, 1961, p. 192).

This movement made very meaningful contributions to the evolution of group work. A concept that was clearly established and is now very much a part of the foundation of social group work is that of mutual aid. Since the workers lived among the people they were serving they were affected by many of the same environmental conditions and problems as were the clients, so they often received help as they aided others. The concept of participatory help was now established. The staff in the settlement house did "things with" rather than "did things to" or "did things for" the client and the clients too were expected to share in this process.

Another important contribution to social group work that grew from the settlement house development was respect and support for the differences in cultures among the clientele. Cultural groups were en-

couraged to teach others about their beliefs, ways of living, and their foods. Participation in this manner supported and validated the autonomy of both the individual and the cultural groups.

Other values emphasized by the settlement house movement, through their classes and leisure activities, were the democratic process with learning and growth. The many classes and clubs provided opportunities to learn skills and also to practice them. Hull House included reading groups for children and adults, arts and craft classes, a women's labor club, and Sunday concerts. A public kitchen was established for the working men and women. Other facilities intended to serve the community were a coffee house, a children's playground, and a nursery and kindergarten to accommodate the working mothers (Pottick, 1988).

The use of the group for social change was actively modeled in many of the settlements. Dinner at Hull House was often the setting for bringing together the neighbors suffering the problems and the persons with the power to help to bring about the needed changes. Often these persons with influence were political figures. Jane Addams (1893) stated "Hull House endeavors to make social intercourse express the growing sense of the economic unity of society. It is an effort to add the social function to democracy. It was opened on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal."

Settlement house staff too were directly involved in bringing about social change. Jane Addams was pictured in her horse-drawn carriage wearing her broad brimmed hat going from house to house putting lids on the garbage cans to improve the sanitary conditions.

Another strand of organizational development that emerged was the formation of brotherhoods, such as Jewish Community Centers and the Young Men's and Women's Hebrew Association. According to Howe (1976) the purpose of these organizations was to "Americanize" the Jews who were just arriving in this country.

Camp vacations for children were another development that contributed to the emergence of group work. The camp vacations had a very different purpose than the summer camps for children that we have today. The aim of these vacations was to rehabilitate the children who had been laboring in the factories for many hours a day and often had not been exposed to the sun or other healthful conditions for months. In describing the young people who are employed in the factories, Jane Addams (1903) said, "The boys and girls have a peculiar hue, a color so distinctive that any one meeting them on the street even on Sunday in their best clothes and mixed up with other children who go to school and play out of doors, can distinguish almost in an instant the children who work in a factory." These youngsters needed to be rested and brought back to health so they could continue to provide labor for the industries.

Many young people were affected by these unhealthy conditions. In 1900 there were reported to be nearly two million children between the ages of 10 and 15 in the labor force, many of whom were working to supplement family income (Reid, 1981). It was not until 1914 that almost all states had child labor laws that forced the discontinuance of this practice.

The development of labor unions also contributed to the evolution of group work. These organizations grew out of the unrest of labor. There was competition for jobs and often workers were replaced by immigrants who were willing to accept lower pay and work longer hours. The security of workers was threatened as a result of this new movement.

Two other thrusts that occurred at about this same time were the adult education and the recreation movements. Both of these programs were closely interlinked with the activities that were being conducted in the settlement houses. Classes were also established in other settings to meet the needs of adults. Playgrounds and parks were established to provide leisure activities for these urban dwellers.

All of these movements and organizations were utilizing and learning about the use of small groups, but there was no professional identification among the workers in the various agencies. Instead the workers were identified with their agency, a settlement worker, a Y worker, or a union worker. Wilson (1976) notes that many of the programs developed during this time utilized many volunteers and only a few workers. They were working together to help with the large social problems "such as poverty, low wages, long working hours, poor housing and exploitation by landlords, inadequate sanitation, political corruption, and caste-class treatment of people" (Wilson, 1976, p. 7).

Two individuals who influenced these early workers and their view of the group were Mary P. Follett and John Dewey. Follett (1926), a political scientist, stated that she thought the solution to social problems would emerge from small groups formed in neighborhoods and around common interests. John Dewey (1933), who spearheaded the progressive education movement, provided a basis for working with small leisure-time groups. Group workers began to develop a methodology and some beginning principles such as "starting where the group is," "individualization," and "learning by doing."

During the mid-nineteenth century, because of the plethora of problems calling for organized efforts, many professionals were developing a "consciousness of kind." The psychologists banded together as the American Psychological Association, the physicians joined together as the American Medical Association, and others such as dentists, educators, and attorneys formed their own groups. By 1918 medical social workers had joined together becoming the first social workers to

organize. They were followed shortly after by the American Association of Social Workers in 1921.

Another factor that greatly influenced the developing professional identity was the Great Depression. The market crash of 1929 brought civic leaders and social workers closer together. Not only were they working together in agencies to directly serve the people who were desperately in need, they were also working in community groups and as individuals to bring pressure to senators and representatives in Washington to get federal help.

Out of these economic and social conditions more and more of the agencies working with groups began to recognize goals that they held in common. These goals were to change social conditions for the poor, to create conditions for people to develop democratic social and moral characteristics, and to help participants adapt to their situations (Wilson, 1976).

All agencies were not totally focused on activities to bring about social reform. Wilson (1976) describes her own experiences in an agency working with teenage girls. Karen Horney, who had immigrated to this country and was connected to the Chicago Psychoanalytic Society, served as a consultant to the agency in which Wilson was employed. In this and many other settings the focus was very much on the individual, the group, and the social situation.

"Group" was not a word often used in the early writings. The more common terminology was clubs, classes, and committees. Wilson (1976, p. 18) tells about her remembrance of how the name "group work" developed. From a conversation between Newstetter and Walter Pettit about a project that Newstetter was developing the term emerged. After Newstetter described the project he indicated that he did not know what to call it. Pettit noted that the project was to deliver services through groups and that services to individuals was called casework, so why not call this group work. To date, the term group work had been used in religious and adult education but had not been applied in the social agencies.

The first courses in group work were taught, beginning in 1923, at Western Reserve University. By 1927 a group services curriculum was established that marked the emergence of this new approach. In 1932 the Association of Professional Schools in the process of standardizing social work education adopted a minimum curriculum that included two group work courses (Lubove, 1965, pp. 151–152).

Agencies were using small group activities and pioneers in group work, such as Newstetter and Kaiser, were beginning to conceptualize practice theory. By the early 1930s there was some understanding of the common elements in small groups regardless of the settings where