Jill Paquin, PhD, Assumes Editorship at International Journal of Group Psychotherapy

Editor’s note: Jill Paquin, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Graduate Counseling Psychology Program at Chatham University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, recently became the first woman Editor of the International Journal of Group Psychotherapy (IJGP). Dr. Paquin has made significant contributions to group psychotherapy teaching, training, research, and professional practice, as well as to the study of the intersection of multicultural competence and evidence-based practice and the career experiences of women working in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. She has served on the APA Division 49 Board and the APRAC Task Force to Service Task Force. When she joined the Task Force in 2014, it was creating new content for AGPA’s website related to evidence-based practices in groups. She has also served on the editorial boards of Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, Journal of Counseling Psychology (JCP), Counselling Psychology Quarterly (CPQ), an international journal.

SV: How did you know you wanted to be a group psychotherapist? What early experiences led you down this path?

JP: My first experience was co-facilitating a group in a women’s prison as a trainee during graduate school. I was supervised by a very gifted group therapist, Lisa Drugos, PhD, with whom I was leading trauma recovery groups. It was an intense personal and professional learning experience that shaped the trajectory of my career in many ways. I was incredibly touched by the women with whom I worked; I still carry them with me. It was also around this time that my graduate school advisor at the University of Maryland left for another position, so I began to work with Dennis Kivlighan, Jr., PhD, which became one of the most important relationships in my life. To be mentored by someone so talented in both the practice and research of group psychotherapy was invaluable. About this same time, I joined a women’s therapy group as a member. These three experiences were the perfect storm of events that compelled me to explore this new, exciting interest in group therapy teaching, training, research, and professional practice, as well as to the study of the intersection of multicultural competence and evidence-based practice and the career experiences of women working in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. I have an unusual amount of editorial experience and was compelled me to explore this new, exciting interest in group therapy.

JP: Yes. I was recently invited to give a plenary at the Annual Conference of the North American Society for Psychotherapy Research to talk about my research using the Actor Partner Interdependence Model, which is a model that allows researchers to ask the kinds of dynamic, relational questions that makes group therapy so rich and potent (and difficult to study). I wanted the talk to highlight how I, as a clinically oriented person, have to work hard at advanced statistics—that it wasn’t something that came easy for me. But I have learned into learning some of it so I could ask the kinds of questions I was curious about that arose from my own practice. I hoped that being honest about this part of my experience would resonate with other clinically inclined people who might feel disenfranchised when it comes to understanding some of these methods. I also wanted to tell my story as a girl, and later as a woman, who was discouraged from developing math skills. Besides group therapy, I also research barriers to career advancement for women and people of color in STEM fields, and I often conveniently forget that psychology—my discipline—is also a STEM field. It is one of the reasons women and people of color serving as editors, for example.

SV: You have published and presented on women in STEM fields, particularly women in the chemical industry. Do you see wisdom gained from that scholarly work informing your role as Editor of IJGP?

SV: It is the single biggest thing to happen in my career. I have an unusual amount of editorial experience for an early career professional, serving on the editorial boards of Group Dynamics, JCP, and CPQ, and I have been providing ad hoc reviews for a couple of other journals since 2012. I was nominated for consideration, and I submitted my materials. I knew it was a competitive pool of applicants who were senior to me, so it was a surprise and an honor to be chosen. I am deeply appreciative of all the individuals who served on the process, especially Elaine Cooper, MSW, PhD, CGP, DFAFGPA, Les Greene, PhD, CGP, DFAFGPA, Susan Garrett, PhD, AFBP, CGP, DFAFGPA, and Marsha Block, CAE, CFRE. I am also incredibly grateful to Dominick Grundy, PhD, CGP, FAGPA, for all of his help during the transition, and for agreeing to stay on longer than he anticipated until I was able to begin my tenure.

SV: You have also the distinction of being the first woman to become Editor of the International Journal of Group Psychotherapy. Is it irony or destiny that only two years ago you were on a panel at the Association of Women in Psychology Annual Convention on Early Career Psychologists and Negotiation: Knowing Your Worth?

SV: JP: My main priority is not to change what is working well. The Journal is a wonderful model for a mix of personal scholarly narratives, clinical and theoretical works, and original empirical research. I see that mix as the primary strength of the publication. I am also passionate about practitioners, theorists, and researchers working together to enhance our knowledge about group work. One thing I am bringing to the IJGP is an increased focus on integration of the various facets of work being done on women in STEM fields, particularly women in the chemical industry. Do you see wisdom gained from that scholarly work informing your role as Editor of IJGP?

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organization. The statement is found on our website and will be included in AGPA Connect material and posted at the meeting. As we approach AGPA Connect 2019, I hope that members will be mindful that attendees may be diverse politically, as well as in other ways. Dominant comments about the “other” can hurt. Let’s create a more curious and respectful model of dialogue than we are seeing on the national front.

Our organization has been busy as usual. The AGPA Board and the International Board for Certification of Group Psychotherapists (IBCP) filed an amicus brief as part of Barry Helfmann’s appeal of his license suspension. An amicus brief is a document that invites the court to look beyond the specific case to its broader implications. In this instance, we asked that the court consider the issue of clinicians being held responsible for errors made by the lawyers they retain. The Court has accepted the brief as part of the appeal, and we will inform the membership when a ruling is made.

The Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health Board met in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for a productive two-day strategic planning retreat. Now that the successful 75th Anniversary campaign is winding down, the Board focused on next steps for sustainable programs and supportive development activities.

Community Outreach has unfortunately needed to be very active in recent months with responses in June to the Annapolis, Maryland, newsroom shooting; in July to the Toronto restaurant area shooting and the wildfires in Greece; in September to Hurricane Florence and the Massachusetts fires; in October to Hurricane Michael and the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting; in November to the Tallahassee shooting, the Thousand Oaks shooting, and the California wildfires; and in December, at press time, to the Alaska earthquake. In each instance, local membership was contacted with offers of assistance and referral to the many trauma resources available through AGPA. Additionally, there have been pro bono trainings in several states for support groups of immigration attorneys and family case workers for the important and difficult work they are doing.

Finally, the Camp Galaxy program for military kids was offered once again in August—our ninth year for the much-appreciated camp program.

Now that group psychotherapy has been approved as an American Psychological Association specialty, the Practice Development Committee of the IBCP is collaborating with APA Division 49 (Group Psychology and Psychotherapy) and ABGP (American Board of Group Psychotherapy) to develop outreach to APA-accredited training programs to provide resources for training in group psychotherapy.

In the AGPA office, Leah Flood decided to stay home with her new son Ronan; we wish her well. We also welcome Angela (Angie) Jaramillo, as Executive Assistant. By the time you are reading this column, AGPA Connect 2019 will be just around the corner. As usual, there is an amazing array of educational offerings. Congratulations and much appreciation go to our two AGPA Connect Co-Chairs, Alexis Abernethy, PhD, CGP, FAGPA, and Katie Steele, PhD, CGP, FAGPA, along with all their committee members and the Local Hosting Society—the Group Psychotherapy Association of Los Angeles. Thank you for all your hard work in the service of what is always one of my favorite weeks of the whole year.

See you all soon in Los Angeles! As always, I welcome comments on this column and anything else in AGPA. EleanorF@Counselman.com.

FROM THE PRESIDENT
Like a Thought That is Also a Feeling:

neurons in the monkey brain. He wanted to team up with
in Prague and ran into the neuroscientist Dr. Giacomo
integrate perception and action. In 1995, I was at a meeting
how the brain puts together perception and action. I can’t
explore this concept describing recent studies from my lab.

AA: You have made important contributions to the
area of imitation, mirror neurons, and empathy.
Please share some of the important insights from
this work.

Mi: My early work on imitation, mirror neurons, and
empathy really puts the body front and center. We have
shown how bodily attunement is so important for empathic
prepositions. We have also shown that seemingly
complex behavior can be studied in the lab. Before
launching our series of studies on imitation and empathy at
UCLA, there weren’t many groups that dared to study them.
I guess scientists felt that the phenomena were too complex
to study. Later, we also looked at how empathy (even as
revealed and/or mediated by fairly simple imitation tasks)
drops dramatically for individuals belonging to a different
social group. The insight here is that you can look at others
through conceptual lenses that create a distance between
you and them, but at the same time, this should make you
realize that you can also look at them in a way that makes
you feel closer to them. I think Marcus Aurelius wrote: “If
I think of myself as Marcus, my city is Rome. But if I think
of myself as a human being, my city is the whole world.”
If we think about ourselves as human beings, we realize we all
belong to the same group—humanity.

AA: Why might it important for group therapists to
understand the interrelationships among imitation,
mirror neurons, and empathy?

KS: How did you get interested in mirror neurons?

Mi: Serendipitously. I have always been interested in
how the brain controls perception and action. I can’t
think of a flourishing life without the ability to seamlessly
integrate perception and action. In 1995, I was at a meeting
in Prague and ran into the neuroscientist Dr. Giacomo
Rizzolatti. His lab had recently made the discovery of mirror
neurons in the monkey brain. He wanted to team up with
an imaging group to study the mirror neuron system in
humans. I thought it was rather interesting, although I have
confess, I was also a bit in doubt. That’s how it started.

KS: Over the last three decades, I have published
six books and numerous articles and book chapters on
the central role of right brain unconscious mechanisms
in emotional communication and affect regulation in
developmental and psychotherapy. In addition to
deriving developmental inter-personal neuro- and biological
models of attachment and relational trauma, my work in
psychotherapy continues to characterize the right-lateralized
brain/mind/body mechanisms that operate beneath the
words in therapeutic change processes. Towards that end, I
continue to offer recent research and clinical descriptions of
right brain functions in early dysregulating attachment
processes, in unconscious nonverbal communications of
emotional experience and its expression within the therapeutic
alliance, in patient therapist transference-countertransference
transactions, in mutual therapeutic re-encounters of early
relational trauma, in rupture and repair transactions, and in
the empathic affect regulatory repair of the subjective self.

KS: What insights from your work with attachment
and neurobiology will be helpful to share with
group therapists?

KS: What is most exciting to you about the frontiers
of this area of psychology?

KS: How do you expect to cover in your Opening
Plenary Session?

AA: You are thrilled that you will be speaking at
AGPA Connect on mirror neurons, an area of
increasing interest. Can you share a brief overview
of your talk?

Mi: Mirror neurons have a problem: They need to
be controlled, otherwise we would be endlessly
and functionally parroting each other. In my 20 years
of research on mirror neurons, I spent approximately the first
decade studying the system itself, and the next 10 years or so
studying control of mirroring. Now I am trying to figure out
how to go beyond the dichotomy of mirroring and its control.
I want to understand how tightly integrated mirroring and
its control are, and how we form continuous interactions
between a bottom-up processing stream (mirroring) and a
top-down processing stream (control). In my talk, I will
explore this concept describing recent studies from my lab.

Mi: Therapists in general, and group therapists in
particular, probably have an intuitive sense of the kind
of dynamics that we study in the lab. Through imitation
and bodily attunement, we get to be in a mental state that
make us close to others—that make us feel what others feel.
Feeling what others feel is the best way to see things
from their own perspective. This creates the basis for a deep
connection, for empathy at its best.

AA: In what ways might understanding mirror
neurons be an important topic for the general public?

Mi: In addition to what I’ve already said, the general
public had an intuition about the role of mirror neurons in empathy and social relations, since they were
so interested in the discovery of these cells and my work in
the human neural systems for mirroring. That was my main
technique to write the book. I thought it was a wonderful
story that deserved to be told. Science was showing us
that human nature is not selfish as we had been taught for
centuries, but rather that we are wired for empathy.

AA: What an encouraging idea that we might be
wired for connection and empathy. Your findings
are exciting and a source of hope and inspiration
in these challenging days.

Mi: It is always lovely to talk about empathy. I am
looking forward to meeting the whole group at AGPA
Connect 2019.

KS: How did you get interested in this area, and why
does it continue to hold your interest?

KS: I will draw on my last book—The Science and
the Art of Psychotherapy—as well as on my next two
volumes of Right Brain Psychotherapy to apply Regulation Theory
to the change processes of group psychotherapy. I will
discuss how right brain communications of conscious and
especially unconscious affects occur beneath the words
of any group member’s narrative, and how this system of
nonverbal communication is implicitly embedded in group
processes. I will suggest that emotional communication
and affect regulating relational mechanisms, more than
terpretations, are the primary mechanisms of change
in group psychotherapy.

KS: What is most exciting to you about the frontiers
of this area of psychology?

KS: I will focus on how early attachment trauma
is re-enacted in the group setting. I will also discuss the
importance of mutual regression in these reenactments and
describe the interpersonal neurobiological mechanisms
by which these trans-essional, unconscious dynamics can be
acted upon emotionally, cognitively, and thoughtfully
reprocessed, and interactively regulated by the empathic
group leader, as well as by group members attuned on a
psychological level.

KS: How has your thinking on this topic evolved over
time?

AA: This book is available in hardcover and paperback.
Dr. Iacoboni is the author of ten books, including a
bestseller, Mirror Neurons: The New Science of Empathy and How We Connect with Others
(Serendipity). His research culminated in the book Mirror
Neurons: The New Science of Empathy and How We Connect with Others, published

KS: I will focus on the role of the right brain in empathy
and understanding others. Right brain functions, such as
mirroring and empathy, are crucial for understanding
the perspectives of others. I will explore how these functions
are developed and utilized in group psychotherapy.

KS: How has your thinking on this topic evolved over
time?

KS: In an upcoming volume—The Development of the
Unconscious Mind—I present a large body of evidence
indicating that the development of the right-lateralized
unconscious mind begins in the prenatal, perinatal,
and postnatal stages of human infancy and continues
across all later stages of the life span. The construct
of the unconscious is now shifting from an intangible,
inmaterial, meta-psychological abstraction of the mind to
a neurobiological heuristic function of a tangible
brain that has material form. Thus, right brain mechanisms
that operate beneath levels of awareness represent the
psychobiological substrate of Freud’s unconscious.
The inter-personal, neurobiological mechanism of the relational
unconscious that communicates with another relational
unconscious also operates in the group context. This model
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Editor’s Note: Susan Gantt, PhD, ABPP, CGP, DIFGAPA, FAPA, will deliver the Institute Opening Plenary at AGPA Connect 2023 in Los Angeles, California. She is a psychologist in private practice in Atlanta and Emserita faculty at Emory University School of Medicine, Psychiatry Department, where she taught and coordinated group psychotherapy training for 29 years. Dr. Gantt is Chair of the Systems-Centered Training and Research Institute, which was recognized with the 2010 Award for Outstanding Contributions in Education and Training by the CGP. She is the editor-in-chief of Journal of Interpersonal Neuropsychology, Group Psychotherapy, and Group Psychotherapy and Group Process, which she joined in 2019. She was awarded the 2019 Academic Award for Excellence in Psychotherapy by the Group Psychotherapy by the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health for her work in editing (with Paul Cox, MD, CGP) the special issue of The International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Neurobiology and Interpersonal Systems: Groups, Couples and Beyond.

SV: How do Systems-Centered Therapy (SCT) groups help expand the emotional range we employ to understand others and ourselves?

SG: Learning to see our groups and ourselves as living human systems lowers the human suffering that comes from personalizing our experience as being just about us or some problem in us. Seeing our experience as normal human experience and related to our context as much as to just ourselves instruments and supports our curiosity and exploratory drive, which is vital in group therapy. The core method in SCT groups is functional subgrouping, which is enormously useful in increasing our emotional capacity. In functional subgrouping, once a group member, let’s say Lisa, speaks, everyone says, ‘anyone else?’ This lets the group know that she is finished and wants to be joined. Joining means the next speaker, Marc, first reflects the heart of Lisa’s message until she feels understood. This reflection process builds an inter-person system container (a subgroup) for Lisa and her feelings, supporting her feeling understood and more secure, as well as more open to her feelings. In this process of reflecting, Marc also stays open to continue understanding Lisa, coming out of himself and relating more and more to Lisa’s experience. Lisa keeps discovering how to help Marc understand her. After Lisa feels understood, Marc separates, connects to himself, and puts his similar build into the group and says, ‘anyone else?’ As this process unfolds, the group and its members go places in themselves and with each other that they have never gone before as functional subgrouping creates a social context for emotional exploration within and between members and in the group-as-a-whole. Functional subgrouping creates emergence and deepens emotional understanding and enables group members to increase the range of their capacity to attend to others’ feelings, in turn, feeling others, different than explaining or analyzing.

SV: Was your initial training in Systems-Centered methods? If not, what was the appeal to you, and how has it affected the outcomes you have observed in your groups?

SG: My initial training was in psychodynamic group therapy, working primarily in a training group with David Hawkins, MD, CGP, DIFGAPA. David suggested I attend Yvonne Agazarian’s Institute at AGPA in San Antonio, Texas, in 1991. I decided to try that the strength in this group approach was that each person’s voice was a voice for the group. I felt freer in that group than ever before and learned not to take my experience for granted. I was also very appealing to me that SCT is a theory-based model and in practice is highly integrative. Actually, Systems Theory is probably a meta-theory as it is compatible with any method. I began a journey in learning SCT, which has completely transformed my understanding and work with groups.

SV: Can you say more about what you mean by the practice of Systems Theory being ‘highly integrative’?

SG: I know you are asking me about practice, yet I want to start with something related to theory. One of the advantages of working from a theory-based system is that each construct of the theory is operationally defined at the level of practice. At this level, any method or technique that puts the theory into practice can be integrated into the work. For instance, SCT works with the cognitive defenses in the early flight phase of a group in order to establish a reality-testing culture. Many of the useful tools for working with cognitive defenses come from cognitive-behavior therapy and can be adapted to an SCT therapy. For example, similar to cognitive therapies, SCT teaches group members to tell the difference between feelings generated by thoughts about differences and feelings rooted in existential uncertainty. Different from cognitive therapies, SCT then asks the group members who were more related to their thoughts than their experience, how they feel for themselves when their thoughts hijacked them out of the present, which deepens their relationship with their emotional self.

On the transition to the flight phase of a group, SCT works to restore the relationship with one’s bodily and nonverbal knowing. Many of the methods and techniques from gestalt and somatic experiencing are very useful in this phase of development because SCT focuses on discriminating the information and energy in the body from the tension of the body that blocks our knowing.

SV: What advice do you offer participants as they prepare to join their institute groups?

SG: Remember that who you are in any group has as much to do with the group and its norms as with you as a person, often more so! This relates to seeing your experience embedded in the group system and not taking what happens to you as personal meaning. Many of the methods and techniques from gestalt and somatic experiencing are very useful in this phase of development because SCT focuses on discriminating the information and energy in the body from the tension of the body that blocks our knowing.

SV: What do you want group therapists to know about you that we haven’t covered?

JP: Diversity and social justice issues have been important to me since I was a teenager, so I am bringing that with me to the Journal at all levels, including promoting diversity in authorship, in the focus of articles, in editorial board leadership, and in new reviewers I am reaching out to. We have two calls for special issues on sexual orientation and gender diversity and group work and women and group work. I brought some amazing new people onto an already incredibly strong Editorial Board, including Eric Chen, PhD, Sally Barlow, PhD, ARBP, ACPG, CCFT, Richard Strauss, PhD, and Martin Kirkjohn, PhD. In addition, I am working with two amazing new Associate Editors, Nicole Coleman, PhD, and Joe Miles, PhD. Finally, if members haven’t really thought that the Journal is for them, or they have not made a connection to it yet, or if it has just been awhile, I want to invite them in or to come back. I am available for questions or to bounce ideas off of, and I welcome feedback and input.
President, recently wrote an excellent letter, published in the Final Impact of Group Therapy. Eleanor Counselman, EdD, CGP, LFAGPA, AGPA We have taken a number of opportunities to raise public awareness about the effectiveness Promoting Public Awareness of the Certified Group Psychotherapist (CGP) credential. The Development Committee is also working to implement training opportunities and promote other professional organizations to recognize group therapy as a specialty. The Practice Practice Matters column is an opportunity to share the various initiatives of the Public Affairs Committee with AGPA members. We hope our work motivates you to support AGPA’s advocacy for access to quality group therapy care for our patients and for proper recognition for the work of our members.

AGPA Public Affairs Committee’s major task is to address issues impacting the practice of group therapy and the access to mental health services in the country. In addition, the committee works to increase visibility of AGPA as a standard bearer for the field of group therapy and highlights the valuable services provided by our members. The Committee is led by Kathy Ulman, PhD, COP, FAGPA, Mlyn Lescz, MD, FBCPC, COP, DFMAGPA, and myself with guidance and support from Marsha Block, CAE, CFRE, Chief Executive Officer, and Diane Feirman, CAE, Public Affairs Senior Director. The Committee’s current work is focused on the following:

Leveraging the Recognition of Group Therapy as a Specialty

The recognition of group therapy as a specialty by the American Psychological Association—a joint effort by the Group Specialty Council, including members from AGPA and the International Board for Certification of Group Psychotherapists, Division 49 of APA, and the American Board of Group Psychology (ABGP)—has been a major win for group therapists. It endorses the skills and training required for effective group therapy practice. The Public Affairs Committee is now working on ways to spread the word and encourage other professional organizations to recognize group therapy as a specialty. The Practice Development Committee is also working to implement training opportunities and promote the Certified Group Psychotherapist (CGP) credential.

Promoting Public Awareness

We have taken a number of opportunities to raise public awareness about the effectiveness and impact of group therapy. Elenor Counselman, EdD, CGP, LFAGPA, AGPA President, recently wrote an excellent letter, published in the Boston Globe, regarding group therapy standards, effectiveness, and reimbursement. President-Elect Mlyn Lescz is interviewed about group therapy in bottom line Health, a print and online magazine with one million subscribers. Martyn Whittingham, PhD, COP, FAGPA, Co-Chair of the Science to Service Task Force, is writing an article about group therapy for the Psychotherapy Networker. We are keen for further opportunities to promote our discipline and welcome ideas and suggestions from our members.

2018 Mental Health Legislative Positions Supported

1. Letter expressing concern about the effect of Ohio Senate Bill 255, restricting professional certifications, September 6
2. Letter expressing support for the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Relief Act of 2016 (H.R. 6597), August 24
3. Letter expressing support for Students Act of 2018, S. 3337, for mental health services in schools, August 2
4. Letter supporting HR2290, The Family-Based Care Services Act, May 11
5. Letter opposing changes to non-emergency medical transportation, May 7
6. Letter supporting changes to opioid crisis response, April 23

The above listed positions reflect the breadth of legislative agenda supported by AGPA through its Public Affairs Committee. The Committee will continue to advocate for mental health reform and access to health care for all our patients. We would like to get all AGPA members to participate in making group therapy training and AGPA resources more available to other organizations. If any AGPA member involved in other professional organizations can introduce AGPA and the Public Affairs Committee to the community, email us dfeirman@agpa.org. Together, we can take the group therapy training to where it is needed.

Alexis Abernethy, PhD, CGP, FAGPA, has been awarded the American Psychological Association’s Presidential Citation—the APA Citizen Psychologist Award, which is presented to psychologists engaged in activities to improve the lives of people in their communities. Dr. Abernethy’s work crosses cultural lines and has resulted in incalculable positive outcomes. A Professor at the Graduate School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary since 1998, she was recently appointed the Associate Provost for Faculty Inclusion and Equity. Her primary research interest is the intersection between spirituality and health for which she has received numerous grants. In addition to her work at the seminary, Dr. Abernethy, who is Co-Chair of AGPA Connect, worked with pastors in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, provided service work and culturally responsive research on adapting group therapy to the population in the Bahamas, conducted culture-specific cancer prevention screening research and collaborated with faith leaders and African American congregations for health promotion and disease prevention.

Let’s All Hold Hands and Drop Dead: Three Generations – One Story, by Elaine Jean Cooper, MSW, PhD, CGP DFAGPA, will be translated into Mandarin and published by Changquing University Press. After publication, Dr. Cooper will teach a psychodynamic group therapy class in China using the group process from the book.
Within the past few years, AGPA has made a few notable their work.

AGPA’s continuing efforts to address diversity issues was a matters. Appropriate changes have since been made, for signaled our growing awareness of the importance of these the Racial and Ethnic Diversity Special Interest Group how we function as an organization. The formation of at AGPA Connect have addressed a range of contemporary articles have appeared in the underserved, at risk/vulnerable populations. The Task organizations and communities (Klein & Phillips, 2018).

Since 9/11, AGPA and group therapists have become increasingly concerned about pressing social issues (Klein & Buchele, 2018). Some have maintained that our understanding of both large and small group dynamics may provide us with a unique perspective from which to understand and tackle these concerns (Klein & Schermer, 2015; Thomas & Haen, 2018; Levine, 2018). During this period, theorizing about the powerful impact of broader socially significant forces upon us has flourished (Hopper, 2003). While there is a long history of involvement with issues of social justice dating back to our origins as an organization (Schodliner & Schamass, 1992), the extent of AGPA’s involvement has varied over time and has been the source of some controversy. Lively debate has ensued about whether AGPA should be devoted exclusively to matters of patient care and providing education, training, and research, or expanded to include broader social issues.

“Our hope is that this description of our experiences will motivate other AGPA Affiliate Societies to consider assuming a more social activist role supporting at-risk community populations by adopting and modifying this conference model to address critically important social issues, including the current migration crisis.”

9/11 seemed to mark a cultural turning point for AGPA. It was then that we entered the public health arena to develop disaster preparedness and response protocols (Buchele & Spitz, 2003; Klein & Phillips, 2008). Since the largest harm occurs in our Community Outreach Task Force, AGPA has expanded and promoted work that addresses broader social problems, collaborating with other groups, organizations and communities (Klein & Phillips, 2018). A vital component of the Task Force’s mission includes assisting trauma survivors all over the world, as well as underresourced, at-risk/vulnerable populations. The Task Force also works with a variety of organizations interested in learning about the usefulness and applicability of group therapy in disaster planning, keeping the public informed. Several articles have appeared in the International Journal of Group Psychotherapy and the Group Circle, and more presentations at AGPA Connect have addressed a range of contemporary social concerns and crises.

On an internal level, AGPA has also been addressing the role of leadership in the face of gender and how the effect we function as an organization. The formation of the Racial and Ethnic Diversity Special Interest Group signaled our growing awareness of the importance of these matters. Appropriate changes have since been made, for example, in how we educate and prepare people to assume leadership roles within AGPA. The latest example of AGPA’s continuing efforts to address diversity issues was a recent webinar entitled, Microaggressions from the Inside Out, conducted by Kvitsa Avola, PsyD, and Sabrina Crawford, PsyD.

Until recently, however, questions about our degree of social activism have remained, for the most part, the purview of individual member decision-making. AGPA, like most professional organizations, has tended to remain neutral in its relationships with the larger community, especially when it comes to responding to politically charged issues. That is certainly consistent with the professional stance most practitioners try to maintain in their work.

Within the past few years, AGPA has made a few notable exceptions to the policy of neutrality. AGPA’s website, for example, provides a list of organizational statements objecting to proposed public charge amendments; support for inclusion, same sex marriages, academic freedom, and a safe environment; and opposition to the use of enhanced interrogation (torture). The recent migration crisis, triggered by the zero-tolerance policy of separating migrant children from parents, has Sobed in full further modifications of AGPA’s neutral stance, especially since this policy poses great psychological risks, both short- and long-term, to children.

Over the past six months, the Community Outreach Task Force has actively focused on the migration crisis. It drafted a policy statement focusing on the administration of separating children from their families. Suzanne Phillips, PsyD, ABPP, CGP, FAGPA, Task Force Co-Chair, was interviewed by Valerie Canady, Managing Editor of Mental Health Weekly, where she described the traumatic impact of separating immigrant parents and children, her labeling of the administration policy as “legislating atrocity.”

Subsequently, she, and Anubhul Raymon, BS, MA, LMFT, CGP, offered Care of the Attorney Caregiver Introduction to Vicarious Trauma to the Immigration Justice Project and the Southeast Immigration Freedom Initiative of the Southern Poverty Law Center. The program was designed to provide a template for further trainings. Additionally, Craig Haen, PhD, RDT, LCAT, CGP, FAGPA, Task Force Co-Chair, developed a set of talking points to provide guidance for attorneys and mental health professionals working with parents reuniting with their children.

It was in this context that the Westchester Group Psychotherapy Society (WGPS), with leadership from Leo Leiderman, PsyD, ARBP, CGP, FAGPA, Shoshana Ben-Noam, PsyD, CGP, LFAQPA, and Robert Klein, PhD, ABPP, CGP, FAGPA, and Suzanne Phillips, who led a full-day conference on the current migration crisis. The Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health co-sponsored the event, held in December in White Plains, New York. What follows is a description of our conference that we hope others might find relevant and useful.

The Migration Crisis: How to Effectively Use Community Resources

The conference was widely publicized and attracted 83 participants comprised of bilingual and monolingual mental health clinicians and community leaders from the tri-state New York area. The format included eight components: (1) opening remarks by the Conference Chair (Robert Klein), which offered a critique of current administration leadership and policy and emphasized the importance of maintaining our core values; (2) a presentation by Leo Leiderman on A Culturally Sensate Approach to Family and Group Therapies with Hispanic Immigrants, which enabled participants to gain a better understanding of the enormous hardships endured by migrants, and the critical importance of appreciating the role of migrants’ culture when providing services; (3) a panel discussion on A Community-Based Approach: Towards Empowering Immigrants and How National and Local Immigration Policies are Affecting Our Communities, which examined the specific aspects of the laws governing migrants and their implications; (4) an address by the Commissioner of the Westchester County Department of Community Mental Health outlining ongoing efforts in the community to address migration problems; (5) a presentation by Victor Schermer on The Inner Language of the Mother Tongue: Beyond Translation to Empathic Understanding, which focused on the obstacles to support with people encountering a new language and culture, and how empathic understanding of universal, developmentally early proto-language can help us grasp the language of the heart and soul; (6) a presentation by Suzanne Phillips on Dealing with the Pain and Potential of Migration: The Relevance of the Trauma Group Model, which examined the restorative potential of the trauma group model in addressing the stress reactions, isolation, fear, helplessness and grief suffered, as well as the resilience and hope needed; (7) a Large Group Process Experience of all conference participants, led by Shoshana Ben-Noam and Robert Klein, which provided an opportunity to share, explore, and reflect upon attendee experiences to gain a deep understanding of the group process from a face-to-face collectively and our own roles in dealing with them; and (8) a wrap-up, during which we reviewed the events of the day with a panel of the entire conference staff, and began to identify important follow-up activities.

This conference was emotionally powerful and effective, occurring at a timely moment, and was immediately tied with the efforts of the entire community. The inclusion of attorneys and community-based directors who work with newly arrived, underserved migrants and their families proved to be especially valuable. An added unforeseen bonus was the opportunity for conference staff to work closely together throughout the extensive planning period preceding the conference. This, as well as the warm, supportive holding environment created by WGPS, was very encouraging. Both of us are of a productive, cohesive work group addressing an important issue is always special for us for groupminds!

What emerged from the conference confirmed our sense of its importance, timeliness, and value. Follow-up actions are already underway, including: (1) A comprehensive listing of all presentations, documents, including a PowerPoint presentation for AGPA Connect in Los Angeles. In addition, we are proud to announce that WGPS was able to make a $3,150 donation to the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health from conference proceeds. Our hope is that this description of our experiences will motivate other AGPA Affiliate Societies to consider assuming a more social activist role supporting at-risk community populations by adopting and modifying this conference model to address critically important social issues, including the current migration crisis.

References

Related Article
Please see the article AGPA Community Outreach Expands its Services Thanks to Help from the Group Foundation, by Suzanne Phillips, PsyD, ABPP, CGP, FAGPA, and Robert Klein, PhD, RDT, LCAT, CGP, FAGPA, Co-Chairs, Community Outreach Task Force, in the enclosed Winter 2019 issue of Group Assets, which describes additional work of the Task Force.
**Consultation, Please!**

I have a therapy group that has been meeting for several years. While there has been some turnover, the current group has been stable for six months. There are now four men and four women, and they do the work. One of the men has a drinking problem. We are working on it in individual therapy, and he knows it’s a problem. Recently, one of the women accused him of coming to group drunk. She claims she smelled alcohol on his breath. He admitted that he “might have had a beer” but denied being drunk, and frankly, if she hadn’t brought it up, I wouldn’t have noticed anything; he seemed his normal self. The woman got extremely angry at him and at me for allowing this behavior. She said it made her feel unsafe. I tried to explore what that meant, as I didn’t think he was doing anything threatening, but she wasn’t willing to explore it. I don’t know if there’s alcoholism somewhere in her background. One rule in the contract is that members don’t come to group drunk or high. I understand that it’s my job to enforce the contract and hold the group, but I don’t want to be a policeman giving him a sobriety test. If someone has a glass of wine with dinner, does that mean they can’t come to group? How do I deal with this situation?

**Signed, Befuddled**

Dear Befuddled:

By stating that group members are not to be drunk or high, we are really asking them to come ready to work and to be prepared to address their defenses that prevent them from authentically working in the group. A defensive posture, which might include altering one’s state through drugs or alcohol, is only one form of defense. You might want to be explicit about asking group members not to come to group in an altered state, which would include any type of mind-altering substances—whether they feel altered or not. You might also state that if members come to the group in an altered state they will be asked to leave as their ability to benefit from the group is impaired.

This brings up the issue you raise about not wanting to be the policeman for the group. The group therapist holds the role of authority and is responsible for structuring and leading the group process in a way that facilitates growth and change. Growth and change cannot possibly happen without the group members feeling safe enough to open up and explore the tried and true ways in which they perpetuate dysfunctional relational patterns in their lives. Our authority is primarily to enforce the structure, such as starting and ending on time, along with facilitating honesty and openness in the group. Guidelines, or rules, including those which group members will challenge from time to time, are a critical part of the group process and movement toward growth and change. Though you are not the police, you do have the leadership authority to initiate an exploration of why a member will break a guideline in order to help the group member and the group-as-a-whole learn about their defenses.

Finally, the group member who brought up the smell of alcohol in the room was probably speaking both for herself and for other members about how safe the group is feeling at this time in its history. While it may not be apparent what the lack of safety might be, it certainly needs to be addressed. If this concern is not addressed, then the degree of safety and trust necessary to move the group toward its next level of development will not likely occur.

Your role as the leader and the primary source of facilitating safety and security within the group is to allow your leadership and authority to be questioned. As uncomfortable as this may be, it is essential that you let the group know that they can challenge you and that you will be empathically attuned to their needs. Of course, it is always a good idea to get some consultation from a trusted source when your group is struggling.

**Thomas Stru, Jr., PhD, CGP, FAGPA**
San Antonio, Texas

Dear Befuddled:

The dilemma in your group brings to mind the concept of anti-group, which refers to “the destructive aspect of groups that threatens the integrity of the group and its therapeutic development” (Nitsun, 1991). This paradigm suggests that the individual, group, and/or group therapist can act as an antagonist to the integrity of group process. Your drinking member (Member D) is serving the anti-group function, and you may be unwittingly colluding with him.

Nitsun (2005) cautions group therapists to be open to how certain fears stimulated by anti-group forces can impede their effectiveness, including fear of failure or criticism, fear of abandonment or engulfment, and fear of losing control and authority, to name a few. These very understandable enactments are worth considering as you think about your decision to put Member D into your group. Perhaps your intuition when it comes to understanding why it is a problem for an alcoholic to have a drink before group is in conflict with your wish to keep him in the group.

The way forward may include a combination of addressing the breach of boundaries, but also exploring their feelings toward you for the member’s lack of clear understanding of the contract, thus insulating him from attack. You can then help the group re-establish connections in the group and with you through exploration of who failed to protect them in their lives (e.g., the woman who did not feel safe), who had alcoholics and enablers in their family (also potentially relevant to the unsafe member), and other transference configurations playing out in the group. Finally, you do want the group to help Member D realistically examine his drinking problem, but the timing might be better after you direct their frustration toward you. Member D clearly minimized the infraction, and we might wonder if he thought that he technically did not violate the contract of not coming drunk or high. Since people with alcohol addiction minimize their drinking, this tendency could be explored in the group after the issue of safety has been addressed.

Rather than viewing confrontation as akin to policing, perhaps you could consider openly sharing your concerns about the anti-group role Member D has assumed and your collusion in it. It seems that you must allow the group to unfold around this rupture and trust that you are able to work with all of them on their destructive urges. After six months of relative calm, it was inevitable that someone shake it up.

**Allison Howard, PsyD, CGP**
Washington, DC

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Members are invited to contact Lee Kassan, MA, CGP, LFAGPA, the Editor of the Consultation, please! column, about issues and/or questions that arise in your group psychotherapy practices. They will be presented anonymously, as in the question here, and two members of AGPA will be asked to respond to your dilemma. In this way, we all benefit from members’ consultation from an objective point of view. Special Interest Group members are also encouraged to send cases that pertain to your particular field of interest. Email Lee at lee@leekassan.com.

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**Signed, Befuddled**
Networking at AGPS (L to R): Andy Smith, PsyD; Jill Lewis, MA, LCISW, CGP; Lauren Watters, LCISW, LDCQ, and Jessica Buchholz, PsyD.

The ATLANTIC GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY SOCIETY (AGPS) sponsored 2018 Weekend Institutes, which were led by Barbara Davis, LMSW-ACP, CGP (The Language of the Body in Group); Charlotte Howard, PhD, CGP (Receiving in Group); Sue Marriott, LCISW, CGP and Michelle Bohls, LMTF, IRT, CGP (Modern Attachment Theory in Groups); and Dave Kaplowitz, LMTF, CGP (Developing Your Own Group Contract). Upcoming Institutes for the first part of 2019 include: Katie Griffin, MA, LPC, CGP, FAGPA; and Joseph Acosta, MA, Ltc, CGP, FAGPA, (Early Lening, Emotional Engagement and Sexual Desire) and Part II—Creative Group, PC-5, PhD, CGP (Common Defenses in Group Therapy). As part of its commitment to expanding the community’s understanding of diversity, AGPS hosted its quarterly Diversity Dialogue in October, The Fluidity of Desire in Group. The discussion centered around the diversity of sexual expression, identity, and desire in group psychotherapy.

The CAROLINAS GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY SOCIETY (CGPS) is conducting its annual membership drive for 2019, offering $10 off the price of membership for next year for those who join before the end of 2018. For more information and to join CGPS, visit the website carolinasgps.org.

The EASTERN GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY SOCIETY (EGPS) welcomed its newest members to The Board of Directors—Leah Sklov, LMSW, PsyD, and Randy Dunagan, MS, MFT, Co-Chairs of the Training Program and Manhattan Discussion Group, respectively. The Board of Directors met for its annual retreat and had a productive day of team-building activities, facilitated by Joan Waring, MS, ADTR, LCAT. EGPS launched the Work Group for Racial Equity Scholarship, which provides financial assistance to qualified, African American professionals who have been formally accepted into the EGPS Training Program. This scholarship is the culmination of four years of monthly discussion groups about race in the Work Group for Racial Equity, co-lead by Christine Schmidls, LCSW, CGP, and Rudy Lucas, LCSW, CASAC, SAP. It represents efforts to improve access to educational experiences historically denied to African Americans. The scholarship was awarded to Geraldine Howard, MFA, BCTC, for the 2018-2019 training year. For more information about the scholarship and or to make a donation, visit the EGPS website www.egps.org. The EGPS Annual Conference was held November 16-17. The theme was The Tragedy of Obedience and the Struggle for Authenticity in Group Psychotherapy. The plenary speaker was Nina Thomas, PhD, ABPP, CGP, who presented When the Outside Comes in and the Inside Comes Out: Transference and Countertransference Divided as Judgments, Beliefs and Principles.

The GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION OF LOS ANGELES (GAPLA) will host AGPA Connect 2019, to be held February 25 through March 2. Sarah Frank Jarvis, LMTF, ATR-BC, CGP, is the Hosting Committee Chair. GAPLA member Keith Rand, MA, MFT, CGP, FAGPA, hosted a party at his home in West Hollywood to welcome AGPA Connect and build anticipation among the local Affiliate membership. Representing GAPLA were: Marsha Block, CAE, CFRE, CEO; Angela Stephers, CAE, Professional Development Senior Director; and Jenia Tripas, Professional Development Assistant. The evening included enthusiastic and meaningful speeches from free GAPLA members and past scholarship recipients who have made AGPA an annual part of their lives. William Whitner, MD, MFT; Rena Pollak, LMTF, CGP, Oliver Drakeford, MA, LMTF, Carmat Zar, LCSW, CGP (currently residing in Israel); and Sarah Frank Jarvis, LMTF, ATR-BC, CGP. Many GAPLA volunteers and attendees shared stories about the professional and personal benefits that AGPA provides to them. GAPLA looks forward to welcoming everyone to AGPA Connect 2019 in February!

The ILLINOIS GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY SOCIETY (IGPS) will host its 2019 Spring Conference May 17-18 in Chicago. Katie Griffin, MA, LPC, CGP, FAGPA, will present Early Lening, Emotional Engagement, Gender Identity, and Sexual Desire: Being Fully Charded in Relationships. Group members at this conference will bring internal templates which, when combined with societal expectations, dictate and restrict the expression of longing, emotional connection, gender identity, and sexual desire. When the group leader helps expand and deepen these internal templates, group members develop more fluidity, breadth of identity, and depth of connection to themselves and others.

The MID- ATLANTIC GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY SOCIETY (MAGPS) hosted its Fall Conference in November. Bonnie Bachele, PhD, ABPP, CGP, DLFAGPA, presented Trauma of These Times: Impact on Therapists and Our Groups. When both group members and leaders are in the same traumatizing situation, special circumstances and difficulties arise. The conference explored the unique experiences that emerge during this challenging political and societal climate and what group therapists can do to maximize healing forces for everyone. An interview with Dr. Buchele and her recommended readings can be found at www.mags.org. The conference marked the close of two years of focused exploration of The Practice of Group Psychotherapy in Times of Conflict: Opportunities and Dilemmas across all MAGPS conferences, movie night, and board retreats.

The NORTHEASTERN SOCIETY FOR GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY (NSGP) continues to offer its free Breakfast Club series, which features delicious, often carb-heavy, food along with nourishing food for thought by distinguished presenters, including Scott Butan, PhD, CGP-R, DFAGPA (Dealing with the Difficult Patient), and Amy Weiss, LCSW (Finding Each Other in a Crowded Room: Using IPS in Group Therapy). At a Practice Development event, Professional Portraits, held earlier this fall, participants were given the opportunity to update their head shots using the services of a Boston photographer specializing in portraiture. Visit NSGP website at nsgp.wildapricot.org.

The NORTHERN CALIFORNIA GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY SOCIETY’s Annual Conference, held at Autʻomar Conference Grounds, is organized every other year at an Institute. At this year’s conference, to be held May 11-2 June, attendees can choose from a dozen different programs. The program is sprinkled with social events, such as singing, s’mores at night at the fire-pit, walks on the beach, and volleyball. For more information and to register, visit ncssgps.org.

The PUGET SOUND GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY NETWORK’s (PSGPN) Annual Spring Conference, Using Theater and Group Process to Promote Mutual Recognition and Command, was held in Seattles own Seattle Center and featured speakers including Howard Katz, PhD, LMHC, and Beth Shields, MA, LMHC, both of whom have been leaders in the field for many years. The conference explored the unique experiences that emerge during this challenging political and societal climate and what group therapists can do to maximize healing forces for everyone.

The SOCIETY FOR GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY AND GROUP CONSULTATION (SGPGC) will hold its 2019 Spring Conference at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, May 10-11. The conference will feature a variety of workshops and panel discussions on topics such as diversity, inclusion, and social justice, with a focus on creative and innovative approaches to group work. Attendees will have the opportunity to network with other professionals and gain new insights into the field of group psychotherapy. For more information, visit www.sgpgc.org.

The WEST COAST GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY SOCIETY (WCOPS) will host its Spring Conference May 17-18 in San Francisco. The conference will feature workshops and panel discussions on a variety of topics, including trauma, gender identity, and cultural competency. Attendees will have the opportunity to network with other professionals and gain new insights into the field of group psychotherapy. For more information, visit www.wcops.org.

The NEW ENGLAND GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY SOCIETY (NEGPS) will hold its 2019 Annual Meeting in Boston, October 2-3. The conference will feature workshops and panel discussions on a variety of topics, including trauma, gender identity, and cultural competency. Attendees will have the opportunity to network with other professionals and gain new insights into the field of group psychotherapy. For more information, visit www.negps.org.

The AMERICAN GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY SOCIETY (AGPS) will hold its 2019 Annual Conference in New York City, June 28-July 1. The conference will feature workshops and panel discussions on a variety of topics, including trauma, gender identity, and cultural competency. Attendees will have the opportunity to network with other professionals and gain new insights into the field of group psychotherapy. For more information, visit www.agps.org.