

Editorial

I have recently rediscovered the joys of audiobooks. It's hard to believe but it has been nearly 20 years since I listened to two of my favourites: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. I listened to these (and many others) on cassette tapes while driving to and from work on I-95 between Fort Lauderdale and Miami Shores. Listening and reading books can be a solitary activity, so it may be a strange opening for an editorial for *Groupwork*. Yet, reading fiction often transports me to groupwork realms. As a groupworker I have a habit of looking for and seeing groups and group dynamics in all spheres of my life. Reading is no exception. For example, when listening to *Cuckoo's Nest* I was transported back in time to the many floor groups I facilitated in psychiatric hospitals (though I am sure I was a better groupworker than Nurse Ratchet). The group dynamics in that story were palpable and extremely recognisable to me. In fact, I used passages from the book and scenes from the movie in some of my teaching. *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (one of my favourite books and movies) also brought groupwork themes to my mind while listening to the narrator's mellifluous southern drawl on my daily commute. Though there were no purposefully formed or therapeutic groups in *Mocking Bird*, the story illustrated larger group dynamics that occur in small communities – both positively and negatively. Community dynamics can wrap around and protect vulnerable people or they can lead to lynch mob mentality. Again, this piece of fiction proved useful in my teaching - especially in relation to human behaviour in the social environment.

Fast forward to the 21st century, and I no longer have a cassette player in my car. Instead, I have a smartphone that somehow plays things through my car audio system. The phone is more powerful than my first computer (A Zenith Z-100) and when I use the smartphone I feel like a character out of Star Trek. Several months ago I purchased

an audiobook app and once again I have been devouring books on my daily commute. The A92, however, is much safer than I-95 between Fort Lauderdale and Miami, notwithstanding the occasional sheep or tractor in the road. The books, again, are full of groupwork ideas and group dynamics. For example, this morning while driving in to work listening to *The Universe Versus Alex Woods* I heard one of the best descriptions of how to go about planning and forming a group. Alex, the main character decides to form a book group as a way to help a friend who is beginning to deteriorate emotionally and to withdraw from social connections. Alex was also interested in exploring existential issues. The adolescent character's attention to identifying an unmet need, developing a group purpose, the purposeful use of activities (book reading), recruitment, pre-group interviews, and setting and use of space was breathtaking. I think I may start using this fictitious account of group planning and formation in my teaching, as in it I found one of the clearest descriptions of how one should ideally go about setting up a group.

Although sometimes fiction is clearer than fact, it is also true that truth can become so obscured that fiction is presented as fact. For example, the immediate reactions in the media to the death of Margaret Thatcher had many colleagues and me wondering if we had entered a surreal world in which well-known plotlines and background stories had all changed. The changed story was not a story that I recognised or would want to read. The moral of this 'new' story seemed to be 'individuals good – collectives bad'. Her death unleashed wave after wave of celebratory rhetoric about the importance of the individual and her relentless promotion of individual rights at the expense of collectives – small groups, communities, unions. I understand the need to eulogise and to show empathy to those who lost a mother, friend, and colleague. I did not understand the need to whitewash the difficult and painful stories of the many groups, communities and other collectives that were destroyed or damaged during the Thatcher years. Thankfully, the power of groups as a counterbalancing political voice eventually re-emerged and the voices of the disenfranchised, displaced, and dissenting were not silenced by the eulogising rhetoric.

Her death and the celebration of individualism did set me thinking again about the place of groups, groupwork and collective responses to social problems. The rise of individual blame and the demise of

collective responsibility really took root in the late 1970s and through the 1980s. Though here in Scotland, there appears to be a stronger commitment to the common weal than many other parts of the UK and certainly more so than in my country of origin, even here the ‘individual good-collective bad’ idea appears in the subtext and sub-plots of stories that are told today. I do hope one day soon that what I so readily hear in my audiobooks (the importance of groups, group dynamics and the appreciation of collective responses) will once again permeate society and we will reverse the headlong drift into the cult of individualism.

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Despite some of the despondency that might be apparent in my editorial, there are many bright spots and green shoots in the groupwork world. This journal and other groupwork orientated journals are such counterbalances to the overwhelming and unhelpful exclusive focus on individuals. Take, for instance, the four articles in this issue of *Groupwork*. Berg and Simon’s article introduces us to a psycho-educational groupwork programme designed to develop a white anti-racism identity. As they state

... the group training model places responsibility for resisting racism in the hands of White European-Americans and provides them with the resources to fulfil this responsibility. (p. 31)

Though the concepts of race and ethnicity shift and change across different countries, the notion that racism is structural and socially constructed is likely to be universal. As such, a collective response is needed to work for social justice. This pilot study was positively evaluated by the authors and as they suggest, further evaluation is warranted.

Like Berg and Simon’s article, the next two papers, one by Lane and the other by Levine, are both set within the higher education sector. Lane’s article describes a programme to help university students successfully navigate the transition from student to the world beyond university. Given the economic climate in many parts of the world, the transitions may be difficult for today’s graduands. Lane outlines a clear theoretical rationale for his group programme and provided enough detail in the article for a similar programme to be developed

elsewhere. Levine's article presents a model for teaching groupwork at a distance using online role-play. This is another descriptive article that theoretically grounds a model and presents enough detail for others to replicate the model. Unlike the model also clearly articulated in Berg and Simon, Lane's and Levine's models have not yet been evaluated. The reviewers felt that the detail presented and the theoretical grounding warranted publishing both the articles. Sharing such theoretically grounded work and providing some practice evidence of the usefulness of the approaches is an important step in the knowledge building journey. We hope these authors or others will take the next step and evaluate the models.

The final article in this issue is quite different from the other three in terms of its position on the knowledge building continuum. Henningsen, Henningsen and Booth present an empirical study that is well grounded theoretically and extends our knowledge about attraction in groups. Through empirically testing the equity theory of attraction, market forces analysis, and personal attraction they found that attraction to groups and attraction to individual group members are influenced by different forces. Researchers and practitioners should determine in which context the different forces are most relevant.

All four articles develop and strengthen groupwork knowledge and remind me of the power of groups. Reading these articles is as refreshing as finding groupwork in a new audiobook.

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