

1993

# Foundations and Applications of Group Psychotherapy: A Sphere of Influence (Book Review)

Donelson R. Forsyth  
*University of Richmond*, [dforsyth@richmond.edu](mailto:dforsyth@richmond.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/jepson-faculty-publications>

 Part of the [Social Psychology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Forsyth, Donelson R. Review of *Foundations and Applications of Group Psychotherapy: A Sphere of Influence*, by Mark F. Ettin. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 12, no. 3 (1993): 237-8.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Jepson School of Leadership Studies articles, book chapters and other publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu](mailto:scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu).

## BOOK REVIEW

*Foundations and applications of group psychotherapy: A sphere of influence*, Mark F. Ettin. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. 1992. 454 pp. \$45.95.

Reviewed by Donelson R. Forsyth and Melissa L. Rose, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Using groups to help people achieve personal goals and therapeutic change is an old idea. Indeed, Ettin (1992), in his book *Foundations and applications of group psychotherapy: A sphere of influence*, suggests that Socrates was perhaps the first group psychotherapist. After all, he regularly convened small groups of scholars who sought intellectual, ethical, and interpersonal insights. Even the sage Socrates, however, could not have anticipated the widespread use of groups that exists today. When individuals experience problems in adjustment, in behavior, or in health, they often rely on groups to solve these problems.

Ettin's book offers many insights into the mechanisms that make groups so successful as therapeutic tools. Not content with a general analysis of how groups are currently used, Ettin instead provides a broad perspective on the historical and structural roots of psychotherapeutic groups. The early chapters discuss the history of groups and provide a scholarly overview of the origination of the group format and how groups have changed in recent years. As noted above, Ettin traces the birth of therapeutic groups back to Socrates, but he reviews the many modern developments that took place during the early part of this century. In summarizing these various methods, Ettin proposes that groups, as groups, promote change in three ways: through individual-to-group processes, through group-to-individual processes, and through collective group-to-group processes. This analysis of collective therapeutic interventions is both comprehensive and discerning.

Ettin, after laying the historical and conceptual foundations, turns to the analysis of two kinds of groups: psychoeducational groups and psychotherapeutic groups. These analyses highlight Ettin's eclectic perspective as he draws on and integrates ideas from T-groups, Jungian metaphor and symbolism, anthropological studies of rites of passage, the learning circles of structured training groups, organiza-

tional development, behavioral rehearsal, theories of group development, collective attributional processes, and Freudian notions of transference and interpretation. Throughout this analysis runs the recurring recommendation to utilize metaphor, symbolism, and imagery when conceptualizing groups. Ettin uses one metaphor after another as he considers the group to be a puzzle: "a series of interactive puzzles and holistic paradoxes to be deconstructed" (p. 167); a pool of emotions: "Within the mental and emotional pooling possible in the intense, supersensitive group experience, thresholds for attending and responding to prescient images, mythic themes, and organizing fantasies are lower" (p. 221); an uroborus: "The image of eternal recurrence, the uroborus or snake eating its own tail . . . symbolizes the group's task" (pp. 312-313); a village: "The whole of the group of primitive community becomes a self-contained village, a field of forces or dreams" (p. 394); and so on. The artwork in the book further underscores this theme; the book is illustrated with powerful photographs of sculptures depicting people in groups.

Ettin offers a fresh perspective on groups, although the inquiry is at times conceptually top-heavy. A heady variety of abstractions and concepts is offered, for he proffers an elegant perspective on groups rather than an application-oriented analysis of what happens during group sessions. Experienced practitioners may be able to expand their ability to work in groups by using metaphoric images, but novices may have a difficult time knowing precisely what steps to take to "transform the group through collective imagery." Moreover, even though Ettin draws on a wide variety of theoretical analyses of groups, rarely does he sample social psychology. Group formation and cohesion, attributions, social influence, group socialization, group boundaries, and other topics are discussed in detail, but the analysis is not informed by social psychological theory dealing with these topics. Nor does Ettin's eclecticism extend to empirical analyses of groups. His analysis is relentlessly theoretical, and he does not use research findings to either bolster or question his theoretical notions. An artistically minded reader may be intrigued by Ettin's vision of the group, but an empirically minded researcher's first question would likely be "How do you know?"