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# The Purpose of Our Efforts

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# President-Elect's Column

Don Forsyth, PhD

## The Purpose of Our Efforts



Don Forsyth PhD

This year's APA Convention in San Francisco was something of a homecoming for the division, for it was in that same city, some 18 years ago, that group psychology and group psychotherapy first took the stage as a newly founded division within APA. Only a few months earlier this fledgling coalition of dedicated supporters of group approaches had successfully petitioned APA for official divisional recognition. As that petition explained, it was time for psychologists to focus on groups and group-based approaches to adjustment, arguing that there "are two basic

psychological approaches to human life and to mental health; one through individual psychology, the other through group psychology" (quoted in Andronico, 1999, p. 179).

Over the next 18 years the division would make good on its promise to connect and support those of us, scattered throughout the APA and beyond it, who shared a focus on groups. Eighteen years of division programming, workshops, posters, and papers at the Annual Meeting of APA. A string of Group Psychologist of the Year Awards, given each year to a researcher, theorist, or practitioner in recognition of his or her achievements in the field. Eighteen years of the Outstanding Dissertation Awards, bestowed with regularity on the best new dissertation dealing with groups. Over the years the division also advanced the basic scholarship of groups, by sponsoring the journal *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* and the newsletter *Group Psychologist*. Its members have worked to encourage greater acceptance of group approaches to treatment, and have succeeded in having group added as one of only thirteen specialty certifications recognized by the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP).

The division also built up its social capital along the way from neophyte society to mature organization. Whereas the division was founded by practice-oriented psychologists (primarily from Divisions 12, 17, and 29 in particular), the inclusiveness of the division made it a home for group psychologists with a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, including educational psychology, social psychology, and organizational-behavior. By breaking down the boundaries between us, the division provided both the means to build networks of associations among like-minded professionals, as well as offering us all a sense of common identity. Now, some 18 years after its founding, when you meet someone who is a member of Division 49—no matter what specialty or theoretical orientation—you know that you share with that person a special commitment to groups.

We current members owe much to our predecessors who contributed so much over the last 18 years, for their work leaves us well-positioned for the tasks that lie before us. They began the work of opening others' eyes to the powers and curiosities of groups, but I hope that in the coming year we continue to make more public, and more undeniable, group-level approaches in a field that too often focuses myopically on

individuals. We must continue to get our work out and into the hands of the public and to our colleagues, so that any misperceptions about groups they hold gradually diminish. To gain further recognition for group counseling and group psychotherapy, the division has begun the work of petitioning the APA's Commission for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology (CRSPPP), and we hope to complete the application by 2008. The call for papers for the next APA convention, to be held in Boston in August of 2008, is about to be released, and all members should send their best work to 49. Perhaps, by the division's 20th anniversary, we will have succeeded in convincing APA that the word *group* should be an index term at the back of the phonebook-sized annual convention program.

We need to also continue to strive to integrate the three sides of our division—theory, research, and practice—and make certain that no one approach or orientation prospers while another suffers. As group-types we know that some forms of conflict can be healthy for a group, but schisms that grow too deep can disrupt the quality of the bonds between the group members, and so we must be sure that the division remains true to its heritage of non-exclusivity: If you study groups or if groups are the means by which you achieve therapeutic change, then Division 49 should be your intellectual and professional home. We must continue to network with other divisions, drawing in group-oriented psychologists to the fold. In particular, we need to identify psychologists who are not yet members of a division, but are members of APA, and cajole them into considering joining Division 49.

Last, we must also help the division grow stronger as an organization. As an 18-year-old, the division is well-passed it's forming, storming, and norming stages; we should be all about performing. To facilitate this period of productivity the division needs to complete the fine-tuning of its policies, procedures, and principles, until it is recognized both by members and nonmembers as a division that is both effective in terms of performance and satisfying for its members.

This is too much work, of course, for a single person or even a clique of insiders who push their agendas forward. Rather, this is work that each one of us can undertake in support of the division. We need to work together to (a) elevate, in the eyes of psychology and the public, the scientific and professional status of groups; (b) maximize the cohesiveness and esprit de corps of Division 49, so that provides a range of resources—from professional to interpersonal to personal—for members; and (c) strengthen the structural fabric of the division, so that it can work more efficiently in the pursuit of its goals. In the coming year I hope you will join with me as we work to build on our past successes and insure the achievement of our basic aim: "to promote the development and advancement of the field of group psychology and the modality of group psychotherapy through research, teaching and education, and clinical practice."

If you have any suggestions or comments about these ideas, please e-mail me at [dforsyth@richmond.edu](mailto:dforsyth@richmond.edu) or leave a comment on my Division 49 blog at <http://apadiv49.blogspot.com/>.