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**Review of *Group Work with Overwhelmed Clients*. June Gary Hopps and Elaine Pinderhughes. Reviewed by Charles Garvin, University of Michigan.**

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The downside of this book is the hard copy, text-based medium in which it is presented. It is very difficult to update and keep current when the content presented is so fluid. Notsurprisingly, some of the web-site resources shared were either down or changed when I tried them, though most were fully operational. The shelf-life of this book would be greatly enhanced if it were published on-line. Maybe that time is not far off!

In *The Internet and Technology for Human Services*, Karger and Levine have accomplished the impossible. They have filled a void in the technologically diverse humanservices literature to professionally enlighten those with techno deprivation. I'm not as certain about their contribution to those of us who need balance and recovery for our hypertechaddictions. I know this book has enabled me be more assertive and competitive with my children and graduate assistants for equal access to Internet time. It just might do the same for you.

Sharon Pittman  
Andrews University

June Gary Hopps and Elaine Pinderhughes. *Group Work with Overwhelmed Clients*. New York: The Free Press, 1999. \$29.95

In an earlier work, *The Power to Care*, the authors of this book examined the evidence for effective ways of helping clients whom they described as overwhelmed by personal, socioeconomic, and environmental problems. In that publication they reported that the interventions that produced good outcomes included group treatment. Yet such treatment was not offered to clients to the degree one might anticipate. This led them to investigate the barriers to offering group services, especially in view of their conviction that group experiences can be very empowering to clients. Their desire to promote group services was, consequently, a major motivation for the writing of this book.

The infrequency with which agencies offer groups for clients conducted by competent group workers is not new information to many of us who have worked to rectify this situation. One of the most important contributions of this book, nevertheless, is its demonstration that group services can be offered in many different settings and take a variety of forms. Specifically, the

authors devote attention to groups for members such as those in the following categories: children whose parents are infected with HIV/AIDS, African-American college women, recent immigrant women, gang youth, parents recovering from drug abuse, and women victims of abuse.

In their discussion of barriers to offering groups, the authors mention difficulties in recruiting members, lack of meeting places for groups in safe places, and the absence of practitioners trained in group work. To these we would add agency concerns about empowering collective action among members, third party reimbursement problems, lack of supervisors who understand groups, and deficits in social work educational programs that limit their ability to produce well qualified group workers. In addition, there has long been a bias in psychotherapy and social work that favors individual treatment. This plays out in agencies whose client referral procedures treat group as a less desirable service than individual treatment. The authors present their conceptual model for group intervention. It emphasizes empowerment and the systemic nature of power especially as this relates to poverty and social status. This book offers a table that illuminates feelings and behaviors related to differences in power such as the powerless feeling anger, insecurity and fear. These individuals lack opportunity to impact the environment and isolate themselves from more powerful persons. It is important that this book points out the responses of individuals who have power and who seek to maintain their privileges.

The empowerment principles espoused by the authors include helping members correct distorted thinking, take actions, and identify and mobilize feelings of anger. The foci of change are social role, social status, and political process as client problems are contextualized. Cognitive-behavioral and educational strategies are utilized to attain these objectives. The authors stress the importance of a non-hierarchical, nonpower stance on the part of the practitioner.

This book demonstrates, however, the difficulty of operationalizing these empowerment principles. In some of the case examples, I found instances in which the principles were operating and others in which, from my point of view, they were not. Examples of the former were found in a group of mothers in

a housing project who took on the "front office at the housing project" (p. 34) and who had a speaker in their group on community leadership (p. 35). On the other hand, in a group of women with drug problems members were encouraged to call the leader when they thought they were "slipping back". The worker did not seem to consider the possibility that they could call each other through the creation of a buddy system — a frequently used tool in such groups. In this and other subtle ways the practitioners whose work was described in this book may at times fostered dependency on the worker rather than on a group mutual aid system.

It is somewhat daunting for this reviewer to question the actions and judgments of the courageous and dedicated workers described in this book. Nevertheless, I had difficulty, for example, with workers such as the one in the "Parenting Group for Recovering Addict Members" who explained and justified her role. This worker was described as "recognizing her position of leadership, and the power inherent in that role" (p. 65). It was recognized that "Although all of these recovering addict parents were poor people of color, carrying heavy psychological and physiological burdens, the practitioner showed deep respect for them individually and collectively and shared her influence early on. For example, in introducing the agenda, she asked, 'What do you think about the agenda I am suggesting?' "

I would have liked to see evidence that the members were taught about creating agendas so they could produce their own and perhaps this happened later. Yet this example supports the point that it is a practice dilemma to provide needed help and to keep empowerment principles in a central position. A major strength of this book is the examples it provides of how workers confronted this potential dilemma.

An even more vivid example of this dilemma was provided by a group for male recovering addict fathers. The worker, in helping the members develop norms, spoke to them about respect for one another and that she expected them to be "gentlemen" (p. 73). I wondered how this demonstrated an empowerment approach as I thought this would have entailed a more elaborated process of helping the members proclaim their own expectations before

the worker proclaimed hers. I recognize, however, the difficulties posed by work with this type of group and the control reasons for the worker's statements. This suggests that there may be a need for a group socialization experience for such members prior to participation in an empowerment oriented group inasmuch as the worker played a central role during much of this group's life. These passages also illustrate a concern I had about the term "overwhelmed". In a sense many social work clients are overwhelmed. This is the reason they have sought professional help. The examples of groups in this book are similar to the many examples of groups with which I am familiar. What makes members "overwhelmed" in the author's sense of the term and, therefore, appropriate for the kinds of service they describe?

My concern over the use of the term "overwhelmed" was especially pronounced in the chapter on the "gang group". Gangs are often a means for members to cope with overwhelming societal inequities and this was recognized by the authors who, nevertheless, condone the creation of a therapeutic group for gang members. I recognize that group work with gangs has a controversial history yet it wasn't totally clear why the authors recommend such an alternative strategy. (p. 156). The authors also employ a strong psychological bias in their analysis of gang members relationship losses.

My major concern about this book is its lack of attention to the extensive social work with groups literature that deals with many of the issues portrayed. The authors state that the approaches used by the practitioner "drew heavily on empowerment theory, family systems theory, cognitive-behavioral theory, and social learning theory" (p. 185). What about small group and group work practice theories? This illustrates to me one of the reasons for a lack of good group services which is the isolation of group work in social work practice and education, a topic that should be attended to in any sociological analysis of the profession. This book should be studied, nevertheless, by social workers who work with groups and its ideas should be incorporated in the larger body of social group work writings.

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