



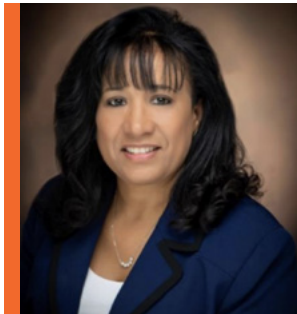
WINTER 2026

groupcircle

Coming Together with Open Hands, Hearts, and Minds

Brenda Boatswain, PhD, CGP, HSP, SHRM-CP

EDITOR’S NOTE: Beverly J. Stoute, MD, DFAPA, DFAACAP, FABP is a Training and Supervising Analyst at Emory University Psychoanalytic Institute and a Child and Adolescent Supervising Analyst at The New York Psychoanalytic Institute. Dr. Stoute is on the faculty of Emory University and Morehouse Schools of Medicine, has taught in the Leadership Fellows Program of the Emory Goizueta Business School, in the Center for Organizational Leadership of the American Psychoanalytic Association, and is a Distinguished Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.



Beverly J. Stoute

Recently, I had an engaging conversation with Dr. Beverly Stoute, a renowned child, adolescent, and adult psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. Dr. Stoute is recognized internationally for transforming psychoanalytic and developmental perspectives on race awareness, facilitating diversity in psychiatric and psychoanalytic education and organizational leadership, and addressing implicit bias in healthcare. Her clinical work makes use of multiple modalities while integrating psychoanalytic treatment approaches in combination with family systems, community advocacy work, and forensic work in civil litigation for children, adolescents, and adults with severe psychiatric illness, disruptive behaviors, neurodivergent learning styles, and complex trauma.

Dr. Stoute wonders, writes about, and presents on: *What does it take to work together in a polarized society?* Polarization among societal groups is characterized by intense allegiance to one’s own chosen group while consciously or unconsciously exhibiting discrimination, hatred, aggression, and violence against *othered* groups. Polarization in society is not a new phenomenon. Freud (1930) noted in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, “It is always possible to bring together a considerable number of people in love so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness.”

Polarization often occurs along racial lines. Dr. Stoute tells me, “We want to think we do not have anything racial going on, but enactments are unavoidable.” As we live and work among diverse groups, we need to be curious about *What gets activated? What does it mean when we get stirred up?* Dr. Stoute has been a catalyzing force in the field of psychoanalysis by creating a developmental framework for understanding the group dynamics of racial othering, helping us in our work with patients and within ourselves, as well as in groups, organizations, and society.

Upending traditional analytic theories of development, Dr. Stoute argues that racializing elements are present in unconscious mental life throughout development, exerting a structuring influence on dyadic and group interactions. From this perspective, she advances a formulation of how racialized othering is a cultural process and a group phenomenon with deep psychological, social, and historical roots. Drawing on case examples, she demonstrates how templates of enactment are embedded in our social unconscious, activating traumatic narratives based on intersectional identity.

These models are useful for group leaders who strive to create a model of the *group as a container for the group*, not just a container for the individual. Dr. Stoute challenges us to work from this psychohistorical trauma perspective, in considering how the affective charge of polarizing enactments is borne by the group and worked through. But this is easier said than done, and she maintains that there is pre-work the group therapist needs to do before the group work.

Doing The Work

Aspects of the pre-work that are essential for group therapists can be found in the American Group

Psychotherapy Association (AGPA) guidelines for creating safe, affirming, and restorative group practices:

It is important that Group Leaders engage in ongoing learning and labor in addition to facilitating groups. This work is aimed at furthering personal identity development, increasing insight into identities different from one's own, and gaining a greater understanding of issues of power, privilege, and social location.

The AGPA guidelines also give examples of pre-work and ongoing work that group therapists can engage in to help themselves resist biased and polarized positions.

- Joining affinity groups that specifically address diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility-related topics.
- Engaging in ongoing personal examination of bias, privilege, and social location.
- Participating in diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility-related continuing education activities.
- Undergoing individual and/or group therapy.
- Reading books, watching videos, and listening to podcasts.
- Cultivating relationships with diverse colleagues who are involved in similar labor.
- Immersing oneself in activities in one's personal life that foster engagement with people with diverse identities.
- Staying current on terminology that is important to people of diverse identities.
- Examining how aspects of your identity impact how you engage with others, as well as how others engage with you.
- Practicing ongoing self-care, restorative, and healing activities.
- Being vocal about the importance of these items when engaging in personal, professional, and institutional settings.

We are not alone in this work. There is much that we will learn and do together. As we come together, let us do so with open hands, hearts, and minds.

Dr. Stoute has developed, moderated, and presented over 150 panels and programs nationally and internationally. Her scholarly work, featured in the archives of the Freud Museum in London, has been translated into German, Spanish, and Portuguese. She has held multiple leadership positions, including on the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the American Psychoanalytic Association and as a Co-Chair of The Holmes Commission on Racial Equality in American Psychoanalysis. Drawing on thirty years of experience as an educator, clinician, consultant, executive coach, and leadership advisor, Dr. Stoute has collaborated with professionals at all stages of career and professional development in not-for-profit organizations, academic medical centers, universities, mental health training programs, community mental

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from the
president

Lorraine Wodiska, PhD, CGP, AGPA-F, ABPP-F,
AGPA President

Bravery: A Thread That Connects Us

Have I, have you, has AGPA demonstrated bravery these past two years? Perhaps. As I reflect on my time as AGPA President, I have been fortunate to have had trusted guides in our remarkable CEO, Angela Stephens; in our wise colleagues and consultants; and in the steady voices of AGPA members. In every meeting, every difficult conversation, every shared moment of uncertainty, I have seen one thing threaded through the work: courage — quiet, persistent, and transformative. It is this thread of bravery that I see woven through our community. This is what I want to celebrate as I write my final column as President of AGPA.

Leading courageously in AGPA has been about being transparent, listening deeply, and allowing myself to be moved by others’ truths. I have felt the vulnerability that comes with holding space for disagreement, and the humility of realizing that real leadership is one that is shared among all of us. These years have deepened my conviction that strength and tenderness are interwoven threads, each giving the other form. And in these years, I have become a better person — thanks to each of you.

Do you think about bravery in your professional life? I imagine you do. As group therapists, we see bravery every day — in the person who speaks a truth long held in silence; in the member who risks being seen differently; in the leader who sits with uncertainty rather than rushing toward resolution. And we see it in ourselves when we show up even when the work is hard, the room is tense, or the path forward feels unclear.

At AGPA Connect 2026, our program will showcase how courage threads through every aspect of our work. Each of our featured presenters calls us to encounter what is complex, deeply human, and potentially transformative. Consider:

The opening performance, *Scars*, sets the tone. It’s an original play that brings to life stories of trauma and healing — how we carry what has hurt us and how we make meaning of it. Scars are, after all, evidence that we’ve survived. They remind us that repair is possible, that the places of deepest wounding can also be sites of strength — an excellent metaphor for group work itself.

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Tony Sheppard, PsyD, CGP, ABPP, AGPA-F

With this edition of the *Group Circle*, we begin to look toward AGPA Connect 2026. With a theme of *Group Life: Holding Space for Deeper Connection in Complex Times*, our annual meeting approaches during complex times for sure. Philosophy professors Ragnar van der Merwe and Alex Broadbent put forth in a recent article that the world is becoming exponentially more complex as time moves forward. This brings up the question of how we navigate increasing complexity in our world. These authors suggest that we use *Rules of Thumb* that guide our experience in increasingly complex systems. What are our rules of thumb for handling complexities as group therapists? As you read this edition of the *Group Circle*, I hope you'll reflect on your own Rules of Thumb that guide you through complex times.

This edition brings us an introduction to psychiatrist and Conference Opening Plenary speaker, Dr. Danielle Hairston by Brenda Boatswain, PhD, CGP, HSP, SHRM-CP, AGPA Connect Co-Chair. Brenda also provides us with an article about Dr. Beverly Stoute, the Louis R. Ormont Event speaker. Finally, AGPA Connect Co-Chair, Ginger Sullivan, MA, LPC, CGP, AGPA-F, gives us an article entitled, *Sonya Renee Taylor and the Radical Power of Self-Love: A Vision for Personal and Collective Liberation* about our Mitchell Hochberg Memorial Public Education Event presenter Sonya Renee Taylor.

AGPA President, Lorraine Wodiska, PhD, ABPP-F, CGP, AGPA-F, in her final presidential column, notes the bravery that she has witnessed in her time as AGPA's leader. She challenges us to continue to lead with bravery, whether that's as leaders in AGPA or in our own groups. Let's take this opportunity to thank Lorraine for her leadership over the past two years. She has truly led us with bravery and dedication!

Carlos Canales, PsyD, CGP, AGPA-F, SEP™, and Shari Baron, MSN, CNS, CGP, AGPA-DLF, from the AGPA Fellowship & Awards Committee bring us an article that speaks to the idea of a professional home and how AGPA serves as just that to so many of us. Interestingly, they surveyed AGPA Fellows about what it means to have AGPA as our professional home. I think you'll enjoy reading these responses!

In *Consultation, Please*, we explore a social skills group that presents some challenging behaviors. Our *A View from the Affiliates* column explores the recent success of the Florida Group Psychotherapy Society (FGPS). In her interview with the leadership of that Affiliate Society, Stephanie Vail, LMFT, CGP, talks with them about their recent conference and how they navigate being in such a large and diverse geographical area.

Finally, we say farewell to our colleague and Distinguished Fellow, Earl Hopper, PhD, AGPA-DF. Earl's memory is honored by his colleagues, Richard Beck, LCSW, BCD, CGP, AGPA-F, and Carla Penna, PhD.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the *Group Circle*. Don't hesitate to reach out with your ideas, comments, feedback and contributions. You can always reach me at tsheppard@groupworksky.com. 🍷

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Continued from page 1

Dr. Joseph Shay, long admired in our community, speaks to the courage required of clinicians. He reminds us that to help our clients feel known, we need to know ourselves — and this is exquisitely difficult. It takes bravery to look in the mirror, to own our fallibilities, and to take the risk to change. In his words, we may hear a gentle challenge to keep looking inward — to remember that growth starts with self-awareness but also requires humility.

Dr. Danielle Hairston brings a different but no less essential form of bravery — the courage to speak about systems that some of us have long failed to hear. Her leadership in psychiatry and her advocacy for racial equity call us to engage, not just empathize. Our work is not neutral. Bravery, in her framing, means holding our institutions accountable to the same healing we ask of individuals.

Dr. Leonardo Leiderman helps us see that courage transcends geography. Through his work across cultures and communities, he reminds us that groups can be sanctuaries for belonging and for meaning making amid global traumas. His presence at Connect widens our view — showing how group therapy can serve as a bridge across difference, carrying the essential truth that we heal in connection.

Sonya Renee Taylor brings fire and tenderness in equal measure. Her work, *The Body Is Not an Apology*, is a call to radical self-love — to dismantling the shame that so often shapes our sense of worth. Her invitation is both personal and political: to love ourselves as we are is an act of defiance in a world that profits from our doubt. Hearing her reminds us that bravery can also be joyful, embodied, even celebratory.

Dr. Beverly Stoute brings us to the inner world. Through her psychoanalytic lens, she explores how we hold complexity — how we tolerate ambiguity and resist the pull toward simplicity or certainty. Again, we return to the central idea of bravery: the ability to stay in relationship even when fear and difference press against us.

When I think about these messages together — artistic, clinical, social, global, embodied, reflective — I visualize a tapestry that is the heart of AGPA. When we are brave together, we listen, challenge ourselves, and hold one another through discovery and discomfort.

As we gather for Connect, I invite each of you to act with courage — to engage with someone new; to ask the question you're hesitant to ask; to speak from the heart even when your voice is soft or shaky. Let the conference be a living laboratory for bravery: in the institutes, the open sessions, the workshops you attend, and the conversations that unfold in hallways and over meals. And as we move forward, may we carry that same courage back to our practices, our communities, and our lives — trusting that every brave act ripples outward.

As I prepare to pass the gavel to our next President, Dr. Leo Leiderman, I do so with confidence that AGPA's tapestry will be more richly woven — with new threads, new colors, and the same enduring spirit of courage that binds us all.

But first, I want to offer my heartfelt gratitude. To our exceptional CEO, Angela Stephens, thank you for your unwavering guidance, steadiness, and wisdom.

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Working with you has been one of the great privileges of my presidency. Your clarity and grounding presence allowed me to approach difficult moments with courage rather than hesitation.

To the Executive Committee, thank you for being such thoughtful, consistent partners. Each of you brought perspectives that widened my view and helped me navigate complexity with greater confidence. Your willingness to engage deeply, to wrestle with ambiguity, and to stay connected through hard conversations embodied the very bravery we teach and practice.

To our Board of Directors — the most diverse in our history — thank you for your openness, honesty, and depth. Your insights strengthened our work and strengthened me. You showed that leadership is truly collective, and that bravery can mean asking hard questions, naming discomfort, and remaining in relationship through it all.

To our DEIA consultant, Kumea Shorter-Gooden, your guidance and clarity have been essential. You invited us into a deeper practice of courageous reflection and accountability. Your presence has been a true gift.

There are countless AGPA members whose insights have touched my leadership — those who have stood with me in formal roles, those who have journeyed with me in task forces, and those whose brief, unexpected conversations in hallways or on screens stayed with me, strengthened my leadership and enriched our shared work. Thank you.

Each of you — Angela, the Executive Committee, the Board, and Kumea — has shaped how I have practiced bravery in this role: the bravery of listening closely, the bravery of staying present, and the bravery of moving forward even when the way ahead was not yet clear. I am profoundly grateful.

And to you, as AGPA members, thank you for the privilege of serving as your President. Thank you for your trust, your collaboration, and your willingness to share your dreams with me. I will see you at Connect — ready, as always, to listen, to learn, and to keep practicing the art of being brave together. Find me there.

I end with a well-known poem by Micky ScottBey Jones that may guide us at Connect and as members of the valued community of AGPA:

“Brave Space”

Together we will create brave space
Because there is no such thing as a “safe space” —
We exist in the real world.
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love,
We have the right to start somewhere and
Continue to grow.

As always, I am open to comments. Contact me at lwodiska@gmail.com. 🍷

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Sonya Renee Taylor and the Radical Power of Self-Love: A Vision for Personal and Collective Liberation

Mitchell Hochberg Memorial Public Education Event: “The Body Is Not an Apology: Personal and Collective Liberation”

Ginger Sullivan, MA, LPC, CGP, AGPA-F



Sonya Renee Taylor

When Sonya Renee Taylor takes the stage to deliver the Mitchell Hochberg Memorial Public Education Event, she will bring with her more than a decade of work that has redefined how we think about the body, identity, and justice. A New York Times bestselling author, world-renowned activist, award-winning performance poet, and visionary founder of *The Body Is Not an Apology* (TBINAA), Taylor has become one of the most powerful and prophetic voices of our time. Her work stands at the intersection of radical selflove, collective liberation, and social transformation — urging us to recognize that the way we treat our bodies and the bodies of others reflects the kind of world we believe is possible.

Taylor’s lecture, “*The Body Is Not an Apology: Personal and Collective Liberation*,” echoes the message of her groundbreaking book of the same title. In it, she lays out a bold and necessary vision: that every human being arrives in this world in a state of radical selflove — whole, worthy, and enough — and that it is only through the internalization of systemic shame, oppression, and injustice that we come to doubt this truth. Healing, Taylor argues, requires returning to that inherent “divine enoughness” and learning to live from it. “Using the term ‘radical,’” she writes, “elevates the reality that our society requires a drastic political, economic, and social reformation in the ways in which we deal with bodies and body difference.” This commitment to transformation of both self and society is the through-line of Taylor’s life and work.

A Life Rooted in Art, Justice, and Possibility

Born and raised in Washington, D.C., Sonya Renee Taylor’s passion for performance and justice began early. She graduated in 1995 from the Pittsburgh High School for Creative and Performing Arts, where she majored in musical theater, and later earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology from Hampton University, a historically Black university. She went on to complete a Master of Science in Administration and Organizational Management from Trinity College. This educational journey laid the sociological and organizational foundation for a multifaceted career that would bridge art, activism, and systems change.

Before founding her global movement, Taylor built a career in nonprofit advocacy and education, working as a sexuality health educator, therapeutic wilderness counselor, mental health caseworker, and Director of Peer Education at HIPS (Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive) in Washington, D.C. She later served as Capacity Building and Training Director at the Los Angeles-based Black AIDS Institute, where she helped expand community-based health interventions for Black people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. These experiences deepened her understanding of how systemic inequities — rooted in racism, sexism, ableism, and body hierarchies — manifest not only in institutions, but in our daily relationships with ourselves and one another.

Simultaneously, Taylor was emerging as one of the most dynamic spoken word artists of her generation. She began performing poetry in the early 2000s, winning the National

Individual Poetry Slam Championship in 2004 and building an international career as a performer and teaching artist. Yet it was during a poetry event in Knoxville, Tennessee, in the summer of 2010 that a conversation with a friend changed everything. Offering words of comfort to someone struggling with body shame, Taylor said, almost offhandedly, “Your body is not an apology.” That simple phrase became a poem, then a Facebook post, then a digital movement that would ultimately touch tens of millions across the world.

The Birth of a Movement: The Body Is Not an Apology

The Body Is Not an Apology began as a small online community and blossomed into a global digital media and education company dedicated to exploring the intersections of identity, healing, and social justice through the framework of radical selflove. The organization’s website now hosts nearly a thousand essays from writers around the world, amplifying voices that challenge systemic oppression and celebrate human diversity. TBINAA’s digital reach extends to visitors from more than 140 countries, making it one of the pioneering platforms linking personal healing to collective liberation.

At the heart of Taylor’s work is the conviction that shame and oppression are not natural or inevitable — they are social constructs designed to maintain hierarchy. Radical selflove, then, becomes both a spiritual and political act. By dismantling the internalized systems of domination that live in our own minds and bodies, we can also dismantle the external systems that mirror them. Taylor’s message is not one of individualistic self-esteem, but of communal transformation: liberation that begins within and radiates outward into culture, policy, and power.

The Body, the Book, and the Blueprint for Change

Taylor’s writing extends far beyond her bestselling *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical SelfLove*, now in its second edition. Her growing bibliography includes *Your Body Is Not an Apology Workbook*; the youth guide *Celebrate Your Body (and Its Changes, Too!)*; *The Journal of Radical Permission* (co-authored with Adrienne Maree Brown); *The Book of Radical Answers (That I Know You Already Know)* (Dial Press, 2023); and the poetry collection *A Little Truth on Your Shirt*. She is also co-editor, with the late Dr. Cat Pausé, of *The Routledge International Handbook of Fat Studies*, an academic compendium advancing scholarship on body politics, fat justice, and identity.

Through all these works, Taylor challenges the cultural scripts that tell us some bodies are valuable and others are disposable. Her framework of radical selflove insists that the liberation of one body is inseparable from the liberation of all. She invites readers and audiences to ask: *What might our society look like if every person believed they were inherently enough? What systems would crumble under the weight of that collective realization?*

Global Impact and Ongoing Work

Taylor’s influence extends far beyond literature. Her advocacy has been recognized with numerous honors over the past two decades. In 2016, she was invited by the Obama administration

to participate in the White House Forum on LGBT and Disability Issues, and from 2017 to 2020, she served as an inaugural Edmund Hillary Fellow in Aotearoa (New Zealand), receiving a Global Impact Visa for her leadership in social innovation.

In 2020, amid the twin crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the uprisings for racial justice, Taylor co-founded *Buy Back Black Debt*, a reparations-inspired initiative that facilitated the cancellation of over half a million dollars of debt held by Black people. She also launched *What’s Up, Y’all?*, a public video series in which she engages urgent issues — white supremacy, reproductive justice, abolition, accountability, and the climate crisis — with clarity and compassion. Through these platforms, she continues to model what it means to be, in her own words, a “midwife for the new world.”

The Body Is the Beginning

Taylor’s forthcoming Hochberg Public Education Event arrives at a critical cultural moment. Across the globe, societies are grappling with polarization, inequity, and the lingering trauma of pandemic years. Amid such fracture, Taylor’s message offers a roadmap toward reconnection — beginning with the body. To reclaim our relationship with our physical selves, she teaches, is to reclaim our capacity for empathy, justice, and belonging. “We will not dismantle the master’s house,” she reminds us, “until we reject the master’s myths about our own bodies.”

Her vision of “personal and collective liberation” insists that healing is not a luxury — it is the foundation of social change. The practice of radical selflove is not about self-indulgence or retreat from the world. It is an act of resistance against systems that profit from our self-doubt, and a practice of creation toward a more just and compassionate world.

A Legacy of Radical Love

As Sonya Renee Taylor prepares to speak at AGPA Connect 2026, she stands as a bridge between art and activism, between the individual body and the collective body politic. Her life’s work calls each of us to a deeper truth: *that liberation begins in how we inhabit our skin, our stories, and our shared humanity*. Through poetry, pedagogy, and practice, she invites us to imagine a world organized not around domination and hierarchy, but around love and enoughness.

In that reimagined world — the one she’s helping us midwife — every body is seen as sacred, every life as worthy, and every act of radical selflove as a step toward collective freedom.

Let this year’s Hochberg Public Education Event be your invitation into that vision. Join us as Sonya Renee Taylor guides us toward a deeper understanding of how personal healing fuels social transformation — and how radical selflove can become the most powerful tool for justice we possess. Come prepared to be challenged, moved, and inspired to participate in the courageous work of creating a world where every body truly belongs. 🌍

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2026

Group Life: Holding Space for Deeper Connection in Complex Times

In Memoriam Earl Hopper, PhD, AGPA-DF

Carla Penna, PhD, and Richard Beck, LCSW, BCD, CGP, AGPA-F

EDITOR’S NOTE: Carla Penna, PhD, is a psychoanalyst and group analyst in Brazil. She is a member of the Group Analytic Society International (GASI) and Chair of the Analytic Group Section at the International Association for Group Psychotherapy and Group Processes (IAGP). She is a past president of the Brazilian Group Psychotherapy Association and a former Visiting Professor of Medical Psychology at the University of the State of Rio de Janeiro. In 2014, she published, in Portuguese, the book *Inconsciente Social [Social Unconscious]*. In 2023, *From Crowd Psychology to Dynamics of Large Groups*, was published by Routledge.

Richard Beck, LCSW, BCD, CGP, AGPA-F, is a longtime member and Fellow of AGPA. He has lectured and written extensively on various topics related to trauma and group psychotherapy. He is a past president of IAGP and Senior Lecturer at Columbia University.

Earl Hopper was born on the 20th of May 1940, in St. Louis, Missouri, United States, and died on the 3rd of November 2025, in London, England. For 53 years, he was married to Cicely and left three children and five grandchildren. He also leaves Céline Stakol, his faithful secretary, as well as dozens of grateful patients, students, and friends.

As an undergraduate student at Washington University in St. Louis, although interested in anthropology, sociology, and social psychology, Earl wanted to become a psychoanalyst. At that time, to become a psychoanalyst, it was necessary to study medicine. However, influenced by his high school sociology teacher, he stayed in St. Louis and did his postgraduate studies in the Department of Sociology. In 1961, he became a friend of the British sociologist Eric Dunning. He introduced him to the sociologist Norbert Elias, who invited him to be an Assistant Lecturer in sociology at the University of Leicester.

In 1962, together with his first wife and daughter, Earl crossed the Atlantic Ocean and moved to England, where he started his career as a sociologist working with Norbert Elias. From 1963 to 1967, he was an Assistant Lecturer in Sociology at Cambridge University, and later, until 1983, he worked as a Lecturer at the London School of Economics. In the 1970s, after qualifying as a member of the Group Analytic Society and the Institute of Group Analysis in London, he trained as a psychotherapist with the British Association for Psychotherapy. He also trained as a psychoanalyst with the British Psychoanalytical Society, becoming a Fellow and chairman (1990-1992) of the Group of Independent Psychoanalysts. From 1995 to 1998, he was president of the International Association for Group Psychotherapy (IAGP).

In 1965, at the Cambridge Union Society, Earl attended the debate between the African American writer and activist James Baldwin and the post-WWII conservative leader William Buckley (Aeon Video, 2019). The event became one of the most influential intellectual debates on race relations in America. Earl was proud of having been one of the members of the audience who “stood up and remained standing, demanding to be recognized and to be given a voice”. Calling out from the audience, he said: “One thing you might do, Mr. Buckley, is let them vote in Mississippi!” The audience clapped loudly. (Hopper, 2023, p.54; Hopper, 2025, unpublished). Recently, Earl was contacted (Buccola, 2019) to talk about his attendance at the debate and published a beautiful analytical memoir of the experience (Hopper, 2023).

Hopper’s transdisciplinary education made him a leading scholar in the study of group processes — not only in large group work, but also in contemporary research on the social unconscious, which interconnects with his formulation of a fourth basic assumption theory. In 1989, at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, through the lens of Group Analysis, Hopper introduced an early version of his *Incohesion theory*. Since then, he unremittently developed an encompassing theory that revolutionized the notion of cohesion in groups, giving rise to the study of Incohesion: Aggregation/Massification processes as a fourth basic assumption in traumatic experience in the unconscious life of groups and group-like social systems (Hopper, 2003b).

In the 1980s, Earl Hopper began to develop studies on the concept of social unconscious. In 2008, in association with Haim Weinberg, PhD, CGP, AGPA-F, and in collaboration with professionals from different countries, both decided to publish a series of books on the theme (Hopper & Weinberg, 2011, 2016, 2027; Hopper, 2024). The joint work forged multiple facets of the theory and concept of the social unconscious. Since 2010, panels on the social unconscious have been present at AGPA Connect meetings.

Hopper’s presence in AGPA is outstanding. In 1997, he became a Fellow of the AGPA. From 2006 to 2008, he served on the board of the Group Psychotherapy Foundation at AGPA, becoming a Distinguished Fellow in 2014. Earl was also active in the psychoanalytic scene in the US, developing fruitful collaborations with esteemed North American colleagues.

Since 1965, Earl Hopper has been lecturing all over the world. From 1982 to 2025, Earl attended and delivered 377 paper presentations through discussions, lectures, and consultations. He published 122 articles and 11 books. As the editor of the New International Library of Group Analysis (NILGA), he organized an outstanding collection of more than 30 books on group analysis, analytic group psychotherapy, and group processes.

In 1999, Earl helped coordinate a conference between the Eastern Group Psychotherapy Society (EGPS) and the Institute of Group Analysis in London. It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship with Earl and Richard Beck, who also became president of IAGP, often guided by Earl’s wisdom.

Hopper tirelessly fostered the development of transdisciplinary



Earl Hopper, Carla Penna, Richard Beck

thinking in analytic group work. Moreover, he has been an encouraging mentor and supporter for a whole generation of psychoanalysts and group analysts. As the last of a golden lineage of group thinkers, Earl Hopper’s knowledge, curiosity, generosity, and craving for building relationships filled with “mature hope” (Hopper, 2003a) will be strongly missed. 🥹

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Leveraging Technology to Support Youth Mental Health and Well-Being

Brenda Boatswain, PhD, CGP, HSP, SHRM-CP

EDITOR’S NOTE: Danielle Hairston, MD, is a Double-Board Certified Psychiatrist and Mental Health Advocate. She is the Psychiatry Residency Program Director at Howard University College of Medicine and President of the American Psychiatric Association Black Caucus. Dr. Hairston is a Consultation-Liaison Psychiatrist, Author, Speaker, Expert and Consultant in Structural Inequities and Systemic Racism in Medical Education and Psychiatry, and an Inaugural Hopelab Translational Science Fellow.

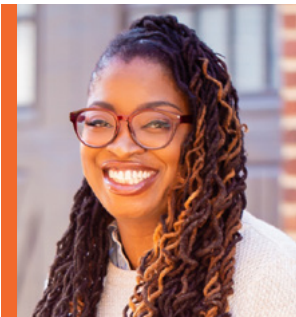
There is a fourth movement occurring in mental health care. The first movement was the development of psychoanalysis in the 1890s, and the second was the development of psychopharmacology in the 1950s. The third movement in the late 2000s was the incorporation of multicultural competency and social and structural drivers of mental health in our assessment and treatment of patients. The fourth movement, occurring now, is the use of technology and digital tools. However, the care of our youth, especially marginalized youth, is often lost in the development of therapies.

Dr. Danielle Hairston is a psychiatrist who has dedicated her career to advocating for marginalized groups in underserved communities to address the inequalities, biases, and stigma that exist in mental health care. Having had her own encounter with racism in medicine, she advocates for

cultural humility in psychiatric treatment and training. Dr. Hairston brings a culturally informed approach to increasing mental health awareness, access, and equity in marginalized communities, particularly youth of color. She is interested in the intersection of technology and mental health among youth. Dr. Hairston is the content creator for the mixed media platform *Black Psychiatry* and podcast co-host of *The Next 72 Hours*. As an Inaugural Hopelab Translational Science Fellow, she focused on how best to translate science into practice to improve Black youth mental health. Subsequently, Dr. Hairston uses technology to improve the mental health of marginalized youth.

Technology such as social media, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), chatbots, and wellness applications (apps) is used globally by millions of people. This trend is explained, in part, by the current mental health crisis;

the growing, unmet need for mental health care combined with the lack of enough mental health providers to meet the growing public demand. Recently, the American Psychological Association (APA) noted other factors such as the increasing rates of loneliness and disconnection, and a health care system that disincentivizes mental health providers from accepting insurance, leaving under-resourced areas, the uninsured, and the underinsured without professional options. The burgeoning industry of mental health technologies provides access and low-cost options for those seeking mental health advice.



Danielle Hairston

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a view from the affiliates

Stephanie Vail, LMFT, CGP

When I had the chance to sit down recently with board members of the Florida Group Psychotherapy Society (FGPS), they were excited to talk about how they've managed to overcome significant logistical challenges inherent to an affiliate that spans a large state (across two time zones!). FGPS has managed to build a cohesive board with members from many different parts of Florida and to create a repeatable format for an in-person conference. They also offer virtual events to be as accessible to their membership base as possible.

Board members present for this discussion:

Lashley Marks, PsyD, President
Josh Gross, PhD, ABPP, CGP, AGPA-F, Member-at-Large
Cory Safra, PsyD, Marketing Committee Co-Chair
Andy Klein, PhD, Membership Committee Chair

SV: *Tell us what you've been up to and what you're proud of at FGPS these days.*

LM: One of our biggest strengths is definitely our cohesion on the board and our relationships with each other. I think we've done a really good job of establishing and maintaining a positive rapport among all of us, and a collaborative style for our decisions. A lot of that is attributed to the people who helped found us, and especially my predecessor, Miguel Lewis, PsyD, ABPP, CGP.

Miguel does such a good job of making time to check in with us, just as humans. He'll email to follow up on a task we're working on, but also ask *how is this thing with your kids going?* He always carves out time in the agenda for each board meeting for us to talk and connect on a personal level, which I think helps us work together as a team so much more easily. It has helped all of our dedication. Not only am I passionate about group therapy and affiliate work, I'm also passionate about supporting and working with my friends, and succeeding as a team.

We also try hard to match our input with our output, meaning, we don't overstretch. I think we do a good job of not putting pressure on ourselves to be something different than we are so that we don't burn out.

AK: That collaborative, supportive approach that we have, it's really the culture of the organization. For example, at a recent board meeting, we had to rewrite a form for something. We started talking about some ideas, and the final task was going to fall to me, because I'm the membership person. I said, "Hey, does anybody want to join me in this? Maybe we can do the form together on Zoom?" People joined in, raised their hands, and volunteered to do that. I think we always all do that with each other. We are willing to do things together and we all share in it.

SV: *Now, forgive my Florida geography... where are you all located in relation to each other? Are you in similar areas, or very different areas?*

AK: I'm down in Miami.

JG: I'm as northwest as you get. My house on a dirt road is seven miles from the Georgia border. I mean, I live a pretty rural lifestyle.

LM: I'm in Tampa. So, I'm maybe an hour or two from Orlando, which is where we've had our retreats and things like that. So, a little more central, on the west coast of Florida.

CS: I live in Delray Beach, which is a little over an hour north of Miami, three hours southeast of Orlando. And then we have other board members who are also in lots of different places.

SV: *Tell me about the recent event with Vinny Dehili, PhD, ABPP, CGP, AGPA-F. You said it was your first in person in a while.*

LM: I feel like that was a really interesting journey. We talked about trying for an in-person event last year in 2024. We wanted to have an event that would build momentum for FGPS. There was one member in particular who was really passionate about it. So, we really debated it and kind of sat with it for a while last year. We had to balance our resources along with the number of attendees (which would be a lot higher at a virtual event because it's a lot easier to attend), versus the depth and the momentum that would be built at an in-person event.

I really appreciated that it was a collaborative decision. We had votes as a board and really talked about it and heard a

lot from our event planning committee, since they would carry a lot of the load for an in-person event. And it became clear that that wasn't the right call for us. We didn't have the bandwidth for it. So, we did a virtual event instead.

Then this year came around, and we started talking about it again. We had a larger event planning committee. We started putting together some of the resources and doing some of the research. Cory was able to use the connections at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). And we were able to find a space that was really affordable for us that worked out perfectly.

We were able to use our connection with Vinny Dehili, who was our past Vice President. It was really cool to see the momentum and the liveliness that comes from an in-person event and being able to kind of network before and after and all those things.

AK: In addition to us being ready for it and really wanting to meet in person, there was a conceptual piece that came into focus. And that came from Cory, who suggested that we consider having it at FAU, at the counseling center there. It worked out in terms of cost and provided so many other benefits, too.

Now we're already thinking about next year: Should we do it again at FAU or should we do it up in Jacksonville? We're considering what school could host this and whom we could approach.

JG: I want to highlight the college counseling piece. Each affiliate society has its own flavor. The Northeast affiliates have all the psychoanalytic big camp people. Northern California is so much influenced by Haim Weinberg, PhD, CGP, AGPA-F, and Martha Gilmore, PhD, CGP, AGPA-LF.

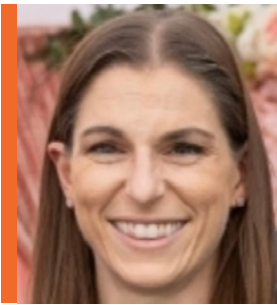
Here in Florida, we got started out of college counseling centers. I've learned about the affiliate societies as we've developed FGPS, and we're a little different because we have so much counseling center representation. I'll tell you, I think college counseling centers are keeping group therapy alive because we teach it.

AK: The tone and the atmosphere of being on a college campus for an event, it's just a fun place to be. It creates a cool academic vibe, and our event takes on a little bit more significance. Since we're not a large affiliate, if we tried to have it at a hotel, we wouldn't be having it at a big, fancy Orlando hotel. We'd have it at one of the smaller ones in the sort of outskirts somewhere, and it would be impersonal. For me at least, that feeling of being on a college campus just lent our event some credibility, and it made sense.

LM: We also drew a lot of people from the counseling center itself to come to our event. And then one or two other college counseling centers saw what we were doing and made it known that they'd like to have it at their place sometime. If we do more of these, we could sort of rotate around Florida in this network of counseling centers and universities.

CS: There are definitely people from FAU who work with me that came to the event. It was a good learning experience for them to be able to get somebody that's really well known in group therapy to come and talk, and to interact with people from different counseling centers and different settings.

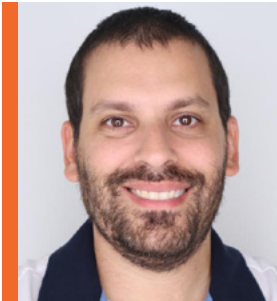
Working in a counseling center, you really only experience the people that you're working with at that counseling center. So, I think it was cool socially just to talk with other people. And for the school, it got people to know about FAU and the counseling center there.



Lashley Marks



Josh Gross



Cory Safra



Andy Klein

SV: *I know you do Lunch-and-Learns and other virtual events. Can you tell us about those? What are some of the topics that have been covered?*

LM: The Lunch-and-Learns we offer are always virtual. I think that's really nice. And being at the lunch hour, it's usually really accessible to a lot of folks. They're free for members and we offer CEs.

CS: I did one on working with Latine clients. Lashley did one on incorporating diversity and intersectionality.

LM: And we've done a series on launching your group — the first steps, like selection, pre-group stuff, and your first session.

JG: I'm a big fan of basic skills. We want our FGPS members to be competent group therapists, to be able to go to AGPA, participate in the institutes and in the learning events, and make headway and know what they're doing. So, I think basic skills will always be my big drive, because I think that's really what we need the most.

SV: *What has your experience been with inclusivity and diversity? I'm curious about what the conversations have looked like on your board and within your membership.*

LM: We want more diversity and to have our board and membership represent our Florida community of mental health providers in general. I think this is a challenge in part because the people who are going to be involved in an organization like ours are often those who have extra time and resources. It filters towards those who might have more privilege. We keep trying to be as accessible as we can and come up with ways to be more visible and attractive to increase diversity.

One of the things I really love about being part of an affiliate is that it really can be more accessible than participating in the national organization. Not everyone can afford AGPA membership or going to AGPA Connect or taking the time to travel. Our FGPS dues are very reasonable. A lot of our events are virtual, but I think it can still be a challenge to have visibility in all the spaces we'd like to.

CS: We've tried to have Lunch-and-Learns that speak to working with diverse populations, in hopes that more people from different backgrounds will be interested in membership if they attend and see what we're about.

LM: We also had a consultation meeting with Michelle Ribeiro, EdD, ABPP, CGP, AGPA-F. She helped us kind of really think through the wording on our website and our mission statement. I think group therapy is a really good community intervention. And if we think about how certain different cultures are more collectivistic, group therapy kind of lends itself to that. 🌍

AGPA Is My Professional Home!

Carlos Canales, PsyD, CGP, AGPA-F, SEP™, and Shari Baron, MSN, CNS, CGP, AGPA-DLF

EDITOR’S NOTE: Carlos Canales, PsyD, CGP, AGPA-F, SEP™, is currently a Co-Chair of the AGPA Fellowship and Awards Committee. Shari Baron, MSN, CNS, CGP, AGPA-DLF is a member of that Committee.

Home is a place of arrival, nurturing, advancement, and departure. It is an environment where we recognize ourselves, feel a sense of belonging, share values, and identify with people. While an array of misattunements and wounds can occur, home is also where we learn to repair, forgive, and heal; where we lower our guard, feed, learn mundane habits, and commune.

The concept of home has deep roots in history, myth, and folklore across cultures. In the US, home is where the heart is, signaling a personal psychological space with a few selected connections. In Japan, the concept of “家 (ie)” extends beyond a house to signify heritage or ancestry. In India, home can denote a more sacred space infused with traditions, spirituality, and family. In Middle Eastern cultures, “بيت (bayt)” symbolizes hospitality, family honor, and a place where guests are welcomed. In African cultures, home reflects strong social bonds, community beyond family; while in Latin America, “hogar,” conveys warmth and affection often associated with gatherings, food, and strong familial ties (OpenAI. 2025). In a polyculture society, the idea of home holds multilayered meanings; however, they symbolize themes of safety, belonging, and identity.

I (Carlos) have been a consistent attendee of AGPA Connect since 2014. I participated in two affiliate societies in California for about nine years before I was able to afford the annual conference. Local mentors and colleagues would speak about the annual meeting with delight; *it was like the New Year’s party you did not want to miss*. Colleagues would refer to AGPA as their professional home, the place that nurtured and sustained their professional life, developed their clinical skills, and gave them a network of like-minded peers with whom to work and play.

In awe, I’d heard that some therapists had been attending the annual conference since the early 80s, not missing a meeting for 25 or 35 years. AGPA offered a variety of roles and functions as well as a multiplicity of platforms for the service of group psychotherapy. There was also plenty of opportunity to practice generativity or the instinctual concern for mentoring and guiding future generations. Seasoned clinicians would prepare workshops of all kinds and participate on boards, committees, and task force initiatives in consideration of current issues and of younger professionals. Over time, I was invited by many subgroups to take part and contribute.

At AGPA, we have access to prominent contributors whose writing, presentations, and personalities adorn the group psychotherapy family tree with glow and soundness. These leaders show up whole and imperfect. I have witnessed them getting mad, stressed, hungry, extremely fatigued, hurt, and disappointed. At times, they reached out for coherence, soothing, and tranquility allowing for more exposed vulnerability and human contact. Billow (2025, p.123) states “I was taught: when in doubt, shut up. Never the most obedient of students, I tended to follow the reverse and still do. So, when I am feeling stupid, confused, or unsure, which is often, I may seek clarity from other group members.” These leaders are accessible, responsive, and engaged. They shared their contact information and liveliness with me. They model participation beyond their offices and towards community, in service of something greater.

In the summer of 2022, Shari Baron wrote an article for the *Group Circle* addressing what it means to be a Fellow. She collected testimonies from colleagues who identified AGPA as the institution that shaped their professional lives. In similar fashion, I asked AGPA Fellows to describe why they consider AGPA their professional home. Here are some of their responses (many left out or edited for word count):

Mitchel Adler, PsyD, CGP, AGPA-F

To experience true psychological safety is more unique than most people realize. To be able to speak your mind, take risks, and make mistakes without having to worry too deeply about being humiliated, rejected, abandoned, or shamed is absolutely liberating. It’s what a healthy home is all about. It’s where we can explore and “not know” so that we might discover new aspects of ourselves, others, and the world around us.

Jill Lewis, LCSW, CGP, AGPA-F

The AGPA offers something truly special — connection, community, and the deep sense of belonging that comes from being with others who share a passion for group work. I’ve found a network of colleagues who inspire me, challenge me, and support my growth as a clinician and as a person. It’s a place where learning never stops. Being part of this community helps me stay grounded, reflective, and open to new ideas.

Lee Kassan, MA, CGP, AGPA-LF

I’ve been a member of AGPA since 1987 (coming up on 40

years), and I think it was the first professional organization that I joined. I’ve made so many friends here, and almost everyone I know professionally is also a member. I feel seen here and recognized for my accomplishments. I can’t imagine not belonging to AGPA.

Francis Kaklauskas, PsyD, CGP, AGPA-F

To recast a Buddhist adage, AGPA is the lotus that grows in muddy waters. I have been humbled and inspired by learning from others’ experiences and perspectives, and fortunate to form meaningful relationships and have opportunities to contribute to the field’s development. The pond has not always been clear, but it has been rich with the nutrients that sustain transformative personal, interpersonal, and professional development. Each time I participate in a group of any kind, I carry with me the countless lessons I’ve gained through AGPA.

Lorraine Wodiska, PhD, ABPP-F, CGP, AGPA-F

When I first joined AGPA, I noticed the strong bonds others shared, and I found myself wanting that kind of connection too. That longing motivated me to attend every Connect meeting and to volunteer. Before long, I began to feel truly connected — to colleagues I admire, to mentors and peers who became friends, and shared a purpose that continues to inspire me. Now, as President of AGPA, I carry this sense of home with me in all I do. I want every member to have the opportunity to feel the kind of belonging, growth, and community that AGPA has given me.

Ildiko Gabor, MFT, CGP, AGPA-F

In the initial few years of my AGPA membership, I heard others repeating the phrase *AGPA is our professional home*. I thought it was a sweet sentiment, but it did not yet become a deep-seated truth for me. As the years passed, I realized that not only did I enjoy my annual weeklong *summer camp* with my group therapy colleagues and widening circle of friends, but I felt accepted in the ebb and flow of my interest and commitment to different aspects of my group life. That is when it dawned on me that AGPA is indeed like a home — I can come and go, I can be either full of excitement or I can disagree, I might want to offer my help and give back, or just sit back and learn and receive — the home is there, to welcome me the way I am.

Esther Stone, MSSW, CGP, AGPA-DLF

My first AGPA conference was in 1969 — I was awed by the richness of knowledge, support, and camaraderie I experienced, and I knew immediately that I wanted to belong to this group. I’ve attended every Annual meeting since (except during the COVID-19 Pandemic) and became deeply involved in educational training as well as governance. Not just my professional home, I consider AGPA also my personal home, where long-lasting, intimate friendships of over 50 years have developed, and where I met my beloved husband, Walter Stone.

Victoria Moore, LCPC, LMHC, CGP, AGPA-F

I have been coming to AGPA since I was a graduate student. I’ve grown up professionally in the organization and am now of a somewhat “older” generation of group therapists, taking on responsibilities of training and leadership. Throughout the years, AGPA has indeed been a professional home for me — sometimes we are close, and sometimes I don’t go home much, and often there is a mixture of feelings, but always there is love.

Joseph Shay, PhD, CGP, AGPA-LF

I consider AGPA my professional home because it contains a community of intelligent, thoughtful, collegial, and — most importantly — caring and compassionate people. It offers a stimulating intellectual and professional environment that inspires growth while providing continued support for developing one’s clinical skills. At its core, AGPA fosters deep self-awareness about how we exist in relationships, both personally and professionally, and it is also a place where fun, humor, and play are welcomed and cherished.

Tony Sheppard, PsyD, CGP, ABPP, AGPA-F

AGPA is my professional home because it is where I’ve met some of the most amazing people in my life. AGPA is a place where I’ve grown into a more compassionate, connected, and competent professional. I can’t imagine a better place to have built not only a career but some of the most meaningful relationships I’ve ever had.

Robert Pepper, LCSW, PhD, CGP, AGPA-F

As somewhat of an outlier, writing and lecturing for more than 30 years about the controversial and anxiety-raising issue of ethics and boundaries in group therapy, AGPA has always supported my views and provided me with the opportunity to share them with our community. I am eternally grateful to AGPA for having provided me with that opportunity.



Carlos Canales



Shari Baron

Deborah Sharp, LCSW, CGP, AGPA-F

I believe in the power of groups to heal and in the healing power of community. What I have found in AGPA is a community of like-minded professionals where there is welcome, challenge, support, critique, and a belief in life-long learning and growth. It’s not always easy, but it is always home.

Oona Metz, LICSW, CGP, AGPA-F

(A member since 2000) Every year I look forward to seeing old friends and meeting new ones. Having friends across all regions of the country — smart, committed, engaged, and loving friends — is what keeps me coming back year after year, and it’s just one part of what makes AGPA my professional home.

Allan Sheps, MSW, RSW, CGP, AGPA-F

The relationships I formed in the Canadian Group Psychotherapy Association have continued to this day. It was my professional home from 1980 until 2018 when it terminated. For many of those years, I was concurrently a member of AGPA, a bigger stage, where I felt nurtured and encouraged and had the opportunity to co-chair a SIG, attend Institute designate and present at conferences. A professional home has acceptance, support, and challenges but also invites us to reach for being our best selves in an atmosphere of camaraderie, friendship and respect.

Cheri Marmarosh, PhD, ABPP, CGP, F-APA, AGPA-F

I have been alone in many professional spaces teaching group therapy, studying group treatment, and trying to address group dynamics. AGPA is the first place to welcome me to publish my work on attachment in groups, to recognize my research, to support my clinical work, and to value my voice. I always rely on my AGPA colleagues who have been secure bases for me through painful times. AGPA is more than a professional home, it is a family.

Charlie Pohl, MSW, AGPA-F, CGP

As a clinical social worker and member of AGPA since 1993, I have found, especially our conferences, very constructive, both for my group work and individual work and my own personal growth. As former president Anne Alonso, PhD, CGP, AGPA-DF, framed it, it is a “village well” where you can exchange ideas and experiences with people from all over the world and engage with them in deep and meaningful ways. Confucius is reported to have once said, “If you are the smartest person in the room, you are in the wrong room.” I have never had the experience at the AGPA of being in the wrong room.

Libby Shapiro, PhD, CGP, AGPA-F

A functional home is one where we connect with others, and out of that connection comes growth, learning, and joy. AGPA has been that professional home for me. It is the primary place I developed my voice as a professional. I joined decades ago, thanks to my mentor, Anne Alonso, and it is within AGPA and my local affiliate, Northeastern Society for Group Psychotherapy (NSGP), that I learned to articulate my perspective in institutes, workshops, and open sessions, publish in the *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, and become a leader.

Helene Satz, PsyD, ABPP, AGPA-LF

I got my Psychology Doctorate with the help of caring others and of Cecil Rice, PhD, CGP, AGPA-DF, who became my mentor. He introduced me to the Northeastern Society for Group Psychotherapy and assured me (and reassured me) that working on the Newsletter Committee would be a way for me to get comfortable, assist, become involved, and get acquainted with others. I gradually let go of his hand after holding the hands of those and the organization he introduced me to, which has been my professional home! 🏡

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consultation, please!

Members are invited to contact Mendel Horowitz, MS, CGP, Editor of the Consultation, Please column, about your issues and/or questions that arise in your group psychotherapy practices. Special Interest Group members are highly encouraged to send cases that pertain to your field of interest. They will be presented anonymously. Email Mendel at mendelhorowitz@gmail.com.

Dear Consultants:

I am a student intern leading small social-emotional groups for 6th–8th grade students at a school for children with special needs, including ADHD, ODD, and anxiety. These groups focus on developing social and emotional skills through hands-on activities and structured lessons. I’m finding it challenging to keep the groups focused and productive, especially given the varying needs and attention spans of the students. Are there models, strategies, or techniques that have been effective in maintaining engagement and structure in similar groups?

Signed,
Feeling Over My Head



Dear Feeling Over My Head,

Ahh, the school-based young adolescent group; often the proverbial *Waterloo* for even the most experienced group therapist. Without knowing more of the specifics of these groups (i.e., goals of the group, goals of the participants, size, composition), it is hard to craft specific advice as to how to help you with your groups. With these caveats, here are some principles to consider.

First, when possible, school group composition should follow the current teen dating maxim: *if your grades don’t touch, neither should you*. The emotional maturity of 8th graders differs from that of most 6th graders and mixing them could hinder the development of a safe, cohesive space.

Pre-screening with each member can help set the tone and expectations for participants and establish a working relationship with you. Before the initial session, guidelines and examples of the expected content and procedures are reviewed to clarify the process and set the appropriate tone.

Cohesion, cohesion, cohesion — the first stage of any group is to establish a sense of safety and belonging before you launch into structured lessons around skill development and certain activities. Many games and activities can help develop increased sharing and connection in the early stages of a group: Two Truths and a Lie; Pass the Ball where members pass a *talking ball* to another member with a question asked or a comment made; The Circle of Emotions activity as a *here and now* emotional check-in where members draw a circle divided into four quadrants, write a feeling they are currently having in the quadrants, and then take turns sharing what they wrote; The Compliment Accordion activity to establish a climate of positive feedback; and The Scribble or *Squiggle Game*, to name a few.

Scheduling groups in schools can be challenging, especially when group time conflicts with popular activities. Sessions should feel more like indoor recess than a traditional class to keep students engaged and minimize resistance; attending the group should be more compelling than the class period being missed.

For school-based groups with class-period time limits, break sessions into structured parts: a quick re-entry activity (a short interactive game or sharing or personal news); a settling exercise (such as mindful breathing); the main lesson, activity, or discussion for that session; a feedback circle; and a closing activity (such as stating a weekly goal). This structure encourages focus, novelty, and predictability.

Encourage crosstalk and member participation. To avoid excessive lecturing, even when introducing concepts or a specific lesson (like automatic negative thinking), I include activities such as role play, bibliotherapy, sharing photos, or Feelings Jenga so members can share experiences or feelings.

To promote safety, confidentiality expectations should be reviewed often, and groups should check in regularly to ensure everyone feels the agreement is being upheld. School-based groups commonly experience unintentional confidentiality breaches, so it’s essential to periodically assess how well the group maintains privacy. When members feel unsafe, they will act out in the group or resist participation.

Finally, it is of critical importance to remember that groups of children and young adolescents will act like children or young adolescents. Neurodivergent or special needs youth will bring unique perspectives and challenges to a group. I am not trying to be glib with these statements, but share a reminder that I frequently make to myself, that it is important to set realistic, developmentally appropriate expectations for my groups and myself.

For more information, I would point you to Zipora Shechtman’s (2007) *Group Counseling and Psychotherapy with Children and Adolescents*, and from the AGPA *Group Therapy Training and Practice Series*, Sheppard and Thieneman (2024) *Group Psychotherapy with Children*, and Pojman (ed.) *Group Psychotherapy with Adolescents* (In Press).

Thank you for your inquiry and the chance to consolidate some of my thinking around working with youth in school-based groups. I hope you find my thoughts helpful.

Thomas K. Hurster,
MSS, LCSW, CGP, AGPA-F



Dear Feeling Over My Head,

First, recognize the very good work you are doing. I can’t think of a tougher demographic who are in the middle of brain development and this is a fertile time in the developmental process for your work to take hold. Second, shift from *progress* to *process*. Look at the process part of your group: a safe place for young people to come together and learn about themselves, learning to be authentic, along with the themes of co-regulation, joint attention, increasing emotional understanding, and increasing emotional tolerance. Coupled with your affirming presence of yourself and fully accepting them, you have the ingredients for a powerful and effective group experience. Keep the perspective that young people cannot learn emotional flexibility and understanding without a safe place to allow things to get messy. It would be akin to teaching a pottery class but expecting members to not make a mess. We learn by doing, and your group is a powerful space for exploration and experimentation. You must tolerate the mess of the unconscious to become conscious.

You asked about structure. While the safety of group members is important, you need to feel safe also, and that comes with structure. My recommendations are to formulate group rules if you haven’t already, along with a set schedule for each group. The schedule helps group members anticipate the length of exercises and processing. I also recommend a *safe zone* for members to go to within the group room if they just need a space to be alone. It might be a bean bag chair or a couch outside of the group but still in the same room. Considering their challenges, it is likely that they are going to get overwhelmed or stimulated, and we must remember that whatever happened to them in their day will be coming to group with them. The safe zone allows them to call a *time-out* and go sit for a few minutes with some fidgets or comfort items, and while they are not technically participating, they are still in the room observing and listening, which celebrates their autonomy. We must be aware that when the unconscious becomes conscious there will be upheaval.

Regarding strategies, think of scaffolding that holds a building together. For example, typical goals in my groups with young people target regulation, self-understanding and self-acceptance, along with social adaptation and flexibility. Thus, make everything that happens from the first minute to the last reflect on those themes. For example, when going over the rules and expectations, the leader can remind the group about the regulation exercises and lead the group. During processing, there is the theme of emotional identification and self-representation that links to self-understanding and self-acceptance and so on.

Techniques: Get Creative! Helping group members to learn social adaptation and emotional flexibility invites creativity for a powerful learning experience. Teaching regulation through body awareness and breathing exercise can be done with floor exercises, moving together and learning breathing techniques as a group. Using a ball with emotions on it can be tossed to identify and express emotions. Role play using scripts can be used to navigate emotional scenarios that are challenging, with invitations for group members to switch in and out of roles as the scene progresses. A feelings wheel and feelings list are helpful tools to quickly identify emotions and practice putting language with the emotion. Music used to capture the state of being of a certain moment can be explored. Members can share a song that captures their most triumphant moment, a challenging part of their day, or a song that matches themes of loss or personal tragedy. Other media, such as YouTube, allow clips of films, shows, or anime to explore emotional themes as well as social situations.

Your goal is not to entertain the members, but to creatively invite them into spaces that spark interest as a pathway to expression, identification, and bonding with peers. Your role is to provide reflections of emotions and content in each of these activities, while linking members together through your reflection of themes which provides connections to the goals of the group. If you have a large group, breaking it into dyads or triads of group members can create smaller experiences within the larger group. This dynamic can promote more opportunities for self-reflection and social adaptation, and possibly deeper analysis and sharing. Processing can be done within the smaller dyads or triads, or it can be done as a large group. For self-representation that links to self-acceptance, members can bring items or use media to show parts of themselves to the group. Sharing a hobby, teaching the group a skill, or showing a video that is meaningful are powerful creative ways to help reflect on the self in addition to being part of a group.

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COMING TOGETHER WITH OPEN HANDS, HEARTS, AND MINDS

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health, boards of education, business, and the law. Her 2023 book, co-edited with Michael Slevin is entitled *The Trauma of Racism: Lessons from the Therapeutic Encounter*. She maintains a full-time private practice of child, adolescent, and adult psychiatry, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, family therapy, supervision, organizational consultation, and leadership advising in Atlanta, GA.

As the 2026 Louis R. Ormont Event speaker, Dr. Stoute's presentation is entitled ***"Coming Together Without Falling Apart: On Hating in the Group Unconscious."*** This is your invitation to join us. You won't want to miss AGPA Connect 2026 in-person and online. 🌍

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LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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But the APA would like the general public to understand that these technologies may lack scientific validation and oversight and are not the same as mental health treatment. The APA has issued an advisory specific to GenAI tools and wellness apps, noting that they do not provide psychotherapy or psychological treatment and should not be used as a replacement for a qualified mental health care provider. These digital tools can, however, be appropriate as a supportive adjunct to therapy. Some of the problems with these technologies, cited in the advisory, include: the creation of a false sense of a therapeutic alliance, risk of bias and misinformation, misrepresentation of services which are often not evidence-based, incomplete assessment, and unreliable management of crisis.

Another layer to this is the use of social media and mental health. Researchers have found that online racial discrimination experienced by adolescents of color on social media platforms is a pervasive issue. The effects are most pronounced for Black adolescents. Black adolescents, for example, encounter an average of six race-related online experiences daily with negative mental health implications. One study linked individual online racial discrimination with posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation among Black adolescents. In a separate advisory, the *Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence*, the APA recommends that adolescents be educated on how to recognize online structural racism and critique racist messages to minimize their psychological distress when they witness race-related traumatic events online.

Dr. Hairston understands that the exposure to online racism and other mental health concerns create an urgent need for group interventions and support systems to address

the mental health care of youth of color. Dr. Hairston has treated patients with media-based trauma-related distress and is an advocate for the awareness of the potential for these exposures to contribute to depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. In my conversation with her, Dr. Hairston strongly believes that as mental health clinicians, we “need to figure out how to embrace technology and use it in mental health responsibly.” Dr. Hairston also points out that, in terms of where youth spend their time, “that’s where they are going. That’s where they get a lot of information about mental health and mental health diagnoses. It’s important to look at these spaces. I learn from my students, even those who are Gen Z.” In fact, Dr. Hairston has a grant as an Inaugural Hopelab Translational Fellow and researches the risks and responsible approaches to use of technology with mental health clinicians working with youth.

Groups can serve as organic avenues to address the mental health care of youth of color. Dr. Hairston is creating virtual safe spaces, virtual groups, and virtual and hybrid retreat spaces to reach youth. Through the innovative use of digital media, including social media, combined with community collaboration, Dr. Hairston builds a culture of care for youth of color. The co-creation of accessible, culturally humble, and inclusive wellness spaces and interventions for youth offers hope and healing. By caring for the marginalized among us, Dr. Hairston is forging a more equitable and inclusive future for all.

Curious to learn more? Join us for Dr. Hairston’s Conference Opening Plenary address entitled, “Rethinking Youth Mental Health in the Digital Age: Fostering Community, Equity, and Co-Created Wellness.” 🌍

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