

# Historical Remarks on the First Five Years of GAP

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at the GAP Meeting -- Asbury Park, N. J.

April 1, 1951

It is perhaps worth while at this time to take ten minutes from the agenda of a busy meeting to review what we have done in the last five years.

It is of course impossible for me to be objective or judicial in any sense and you would not expect that. I don't know that it is possible.

It is one of the great regrets of Bill and myself that we have not had expert students of group dynamics with us from the very first meeting in May 1946, at the Palmer House in Chicago, to observe the multiple activities which GAP has evolved since that date because to us they are extremely fascinating. We think that these activities represent a characteristic pressure point, which is an index to a good deal of the intellectual and emotional life of the middle of the 20th Century and we are egotistical enough to think that they are highly indicative of the future.

I don't know to what extent it is worth while to try to recapture for you the turbulence which was represented in the members who were present at that convention. It is pertinent to point out that many of us came from a long period of service, and that we had many dissatisfactions with the circumstances of our life in the service. We had been accustomed to giving service to others, with relatively little thought to self. Some of us were entirely dissatisfied with returning to highly selfish careerist patterns and wanted to do more that was significant for the improvement of psychiatry and this basic spirit was what led us to adopt the rather presumptuous title, the "Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry," when we might have chosen some other and more neutral title.

The origins then of GAP are rooted in revolt, in dissatisfaction both social and intellectual, but lest the future student of group dynamics oversimplify the picture, I would mention that this group of dissidents included both young and old, members of the Armed Services and civilians. It attracted both those of the "in" group, if you please, including three ex-presidents of the A.P.A. who were among our most enthusiastic originators. It should also be mentioned that several distinguished men who were high in the hierarchy of the A.P.A., and who suffered somewhat at our hands, elected to be with us. I am referring to the

first election in which three councillors were defeated on the Nominating Committee's slate, and yet each of those three gentlemen generously came into GAP and has served with distinction and to the great good of the organization.

Perhaps we might say that this group of dissatisfied men were looking for a more adequate representation of professional psychiatrists in the larger field of public affairs and in the larger field of the medical profession, and we wanted to have a more concrete voice. It did not seem that the parent organization had the facility to furnish us with the medium for communication which was required.

I can give it as my personal opinion after service with the parent organization, that in spite of all our concerted efforts, and that includes a great many people in this room who actively hold office, that unfortunately the parent organization still is unable to furnish the medium for communication which we need, and I think this is the answer in part to the potentiality for the continuance of GAP.

The failure of the committee system in a huge organization is such that there is ample room for the committees of GAP to do excellent work without being rivalrous in a destructive sense.

I might mention one thing in passing which might be forgotten, that is, one of the initial and crucial questions that had to be acted on by the men in the smoke filled room in 1946. They had to decide whether or not it was possible to work within the framework of the parent organization. They did think it possible in spite of much opposition, because at that time there were many pessimists who felt that the only thing to do was to break cleanly and start a new society. They believed we could do much to help the parent organization, and this step I believe has been a rewarding one. Many signs are evident that in five years we have kept the faith with the larger parent organization.

In reviewing what actually happened during these five years, I might now best begin with a statement of fact. This group of about 100 men, who represented the best abilities in the country, with a great deal of energy, a great desire to ac-

comply something, create something, to do something which was of significance beyond the daily routine in their job, were in a state of turbulent, chaotic, amorphous milling about, which might well have resulted in all kinds of separatist movements which would have been ineffective in the long run because sufficient resources could not be mobilized to make them of significance on a national scale.

I think that we were extremely fortunate at that time to have Doctor Will furnish the leadership in which the design for strong committee activity within the organization of a democratic group, which yet had a central leadership in which communication was maximal, made possible the bringing together of a highly varied group of individuals. It is difficult to understand how they could have gotten together if it had not been for his outstanding gifts at uniting people with many different backgrounds and many different goals and many different methods of working.

The second factor that should be recorded at this time is the vision of the Commonwealth Foundation, which made possible the meeting of these people to work out their individual and collective problems, and I think they deserve tribute also.

Doctor Will visualized the organization of GAP as consisting essentially of a number of small hard-hitting teams; necessarily small because in their relatively limited size, say all the way from five to fifteen members, there was maximal mobility. Also it is doubtful whether in any field one can enlist for various reasons more members than that at the level of expertness and prestige which we desire.

Another characteristic of the people forming each individual committee was not only high excellence in scholarship and a large experience, but something else which is equally rare and the combination is not easy to find, and that is the ability to communicate. With these small teams of experts focusing on a problem, one problem at a time, there is the possibility that the committees individually could exert social pressure far beyond the immediate limits of the GAP locale. Acting together, the single committees could exercise collective social pressures on large social issues, which seem to be important to the group.

I would like to point out that this general conception is not unlike that of the university. One of the rewards of GAP to me is that I feel I am attending a university function. There is a community of scholars who get together to discuss

their proper business, their proper subject matter and are able to become acquainted with the difficulties which prevent them from doing their work better and reaching a larger audience.

The individual committee autonomy guaranteed in practice the academic freedom which is essential to progress and made possible potentials of expression which I hope will be the hallmark of this organization as long as it continues.

The collective action of GAP in regard to social issues and its effects upon reaching a wider public, were a continuous storm center throughout these five years. We have grown more mature perhaps, certainly wiser, certainly more sophisticated in the type of language and the logic of our grammar in how it present reports. We are less missionary perhaps in the language of the later reports and less assertive. We are learning the techniques of the more modulated statement and in this way we will reach even larger audiences than we have in the past.

What are some of the other current rewards of GAP activities? I think, first of all, we should remember clearly that the government agencies out of which we had come were very anxious to have a group of experts with which they could consult. The GAP Report No. 1 on shock therapy, which gained us our widest publicity, was in very real measure a response to the request of the gentlemen in the Army, the Navy, the U.S.P.H.S., and the V.A., for a directive which they could not get from any other similar group due to the lack of existing machinery. Whatever your opinions about that report, I think that most of you would grant that five years later it is less of a fighting matter than it was at the time of its issuance and that many medical organizations have adopted every single concept in that first GAP report. There was no real need to feel ashamed of it then or now. As one example, I would mention the acceptance by the New York State Medical Society of every major tenet in that report. We still have close liaison with government and there are representative members here from the major government agencies at each of the GAP meetings. Today some of us feel very strongly that we have allegiances to them and we think that here is one of the hidden assets of GAP which might escape you. We hope we are of value and we want to improve our consultation value to the people in government. Only those who have lived in the turmoil of Washington know how much help it can be to have your colleagues give you advice and counsel when the rugged questions come up in facing the fire of Congressional and inter-ser-

vice inquisition.

The many ramifications of GAP activity, both intellectual and social, were well summarized by Doctor Will in his letter to the Commonwealth Fund, which ran a good many pages. I need not, since it was sent to you, repeat that. To review that message would take a long time, but I'm certain that some day many of you may be interested in looking again at that document, showing how many offices were held, how many organizations are represented, the extraordinarily wide representation of GAP membership all over the United States and in the international organizations.

Another example of the hidden assets of GAP work is the advertising counsel project, even though it did not end as desirably as we hoped, but I do think that all of us and other people learned a great deal from the experience.

Then there is the Mental Health Film Board that you know about; the World Health Organization and other international organizations who use GAP reports as their study books. It would be impossible for me to try to characterize the 18 published reports at this time and I won't, except to say that there has been a distribution of more than 8,000 copies on an average of every single one of those reports. Many of them run very much higher and reach many groups other than those of the psychiatrists. The ones to come, for instance, on panic reactions and Psychiatric Aspects of Civilian Defense, Psychiatry and Industry, The Relation of Child Psychiatry and Pediatrics, and Forensic Psychiatry will be as pertinent as any of the previous 18. We have every reason to expect the quality of the GAP reports to be as good as they have ever been, if not better.

Again I pick two committees purely at random. The Hospital Committee has on tap two vital subjects, "The Psychiatric Patient and Tuberculosis," and "The Training of Psychiatric Aides and Research in State Hospitals." All of you can see that these topics ramify far beyond the narrow psychiatric community. Here we go into the medical field, the hospital field and even the frontier of research where we try to mobilize the tremendous assets of our state hospitals for the future. From just these few titles, any historian would infer that the small nuclear representation here has the potentiality for being of significance for at least this generation, if not beyond.

Another immediate reward, for instance, and there are many in the past besides this, is the current work of the Medical Education Commit-

tee, which started so well, and then had a period of decline. It is their examination of residency training which will fit in very much with the Cornell conference of 1952 to be held by the American Psychiatric Association.

There is no need here to emphasize again the cross-fertilization with dozens of other medical and lay groups who use our literature and our members as teachers and counselors and officers, and presumably the teachings of GAP are significant in many organizations of which we are not aware.

It seems to me that the greatest reward for work on GAP committees is the vital individual experience, in which when one comes to Asbury Park one feels one is getting a very great deal. There is a reassertion of faith and worthwhileness of what one is doing. There is a reaffirmation of faith in the value of the intellect, although we are in an apparently philosophic phase of anti-intellectualism and philosophic despair.

I would like to mention in passing that for the communications engineer, psychologist of group dynamics and the semanticist, the GAP experiment is a gold mine. Not only is it a gold mine in terms of its collective activities, but more important are the experiments represented by each individual committee. We have 17 committees. Bill and I and our associates have had the opportunity of seeing the rise and decline of interest, revivification, the relative success, let us say, of some, and the relative failures of others over this period. It is not always easy to say why a committee is successful or not. It is not easy to know whether it is the personnel who compose the committee, or their relationships to each other, or the content that has a good deal to do with their relative success and failure.

Because we have so many new members, I would like to mention this, because we talk about this all the time. What makes a good committee? Is it just leadership? Is it individual brilliance? Is it individual devotion to GAP or to the subject matter? Believe me it is hard to say because if we took time we could give example after example of this rise and decline of interest and success in productivity, not always in terms of written reports, but the reward to the individual members. They are due to sets of relationships which have so many variables with so many unconscious and other hidden variables that we are not able to tag them. To the fifty new members here, I suggest that one of the rewards of coming to GAP is not only to be associated with a group of distinguished colleagues, where one can feed on ideas

and have a truly intellectual holiday in the best Greek sense, but also to watch the mechanics by which men can work together at all. In this, the middle of the 20th Century with the dissolution of many of the old ties, it is not at all clear that we are not fragmenting more and more and declining to lower levels of achievement.

In any biological system the more fragile organisms suffer most under stress and we, it seems to me, are doing the remarkable thing of showing that ideas for their own sake are worth while, and can be the cohesive attracting unit by which we come together and have a good time at a high level.

I am pleased that Doctor Allen has started the study of our group dynamics with Professor Cartwright, and I do hope that he and his colleagues come with the special instruments of his techniques and see what can be learned about this intricate area.

A more immediate goal would be intensive work by individual committee members on their own experience in committees and a report of biographical relationships.

I now come to the question about which I am giving opinions which are purely my own. In what ways are we different on the 1st of April 1951 than we were in May 1946? I would say first that as a group we are less uneasy, less apprehensive in all spheres of our activity. This is notable, for during the last few meetings we have had no mention as to what is the future of GAP which haunted so many of our valuable hours during the first three years. We now, like good soldiers, go on with the job which is essential to keep GAP going and there are no hidden ambivalences and no cries as to what our future goals will be. There is less rebelliousness, less need to expostulate against existing public evils in an indiscriminate way. This is not to say we don't have positions, and they will probably come up again, but on the whole there has been less focus on social pressures, to get something done in outside organizations, less focus on current problems outside our own field, and a much more scholarly attitude. I believe this is accompanied by more satisfaction in the individual work of the committee, more genuine reward from the content, from the material with which the committee is nominally occupied. There is less need to get results by taking the role of rebel. I believe there is less doubt about the value of what we are doing. We can accept our name, our position in the

community, and the excellence of the reports at face value. There is less fear about the organization as a political structure. We have shown ourselves capable, and I think it was a remarkable feat, to go from a kind of caucus organization to a well structured one with a constitution. We are now able to replace officers in orderly elections, and to raise money for our own continuance without the more distressing hours which many of us remember in the early years.

GAP has shown that it is more than a one-man organization, and it is able to preserve its continuity at a high level of intellectual and social achievement.

In conclusion, I would say that we are very proud of our new members. There is no question in my mind that the level of excellence which will be achieved by the reports to come will equal those of the past. I wish I could pay special tribute to the work of some of the committees in the past. I intended to but I have taken too long already. When a bound volume of the first 21 or 22 GAP reports comes to you in a few months, you will all say this was a worth while job, both in the content and style of the written material which is there for the guidance of thousands of people who want help and cannot get it any other way. We are the people who can provide specific information if it is available and if we work at communicating it. For example, the two publications by the Psychiatric Social Work Committee under the leadership of Doctor Kenworthy to me are classics in the field of social work, and they can be and are used as texts. Similarly, we could go down the line with the other reports demonstrating the tremendous ramifications of influence that they represent.

I hope that the future of GAP will be, as its past, involved principally in the good fellowship. This fellowship is not only social, but also the quiet pride and strength that we get when living together as intelligent people concerned with a very difficult content, working with very obscure, vague and ill-formulated methods. We have faith in the future that these methods will pay off if we treat each other reasonably, if we have a decent historical perspective and tolerance, if we can cultivate some of the spirit of the complementary that J. Robert Oppenheimer talked so much about in publicizing the principles of Niels Bohr. Then we will be proud to come here to meet, to dedicate ourselves as students to the most important business of the world which is thinking about thinking.