

Counselling. I am not yet convinced that I can discharge this embarrassment by laughing.

#### References

1. I have myself been brought to tears on uttering the word 'marrow' when describing

the feeling of deprivation as being a constriction in the marrow of my bones. I have known others to discharge on acne; and the healing benefits of RC in cases of accident, operations, etc. are described in the Elementary Co-Counsellors Manual.

2. Re-evaluation Therapy: Theoretical Framework (Bernard Somers) (Rational Island Publishers, Seattle.)

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## Encounter Conflicts

I enjoy attending encounter groups. They have helped me a great deal and I believe in their therapeutic qualities.

Whilst I agree with most of what occurs at encounter groups, I feel that some of the beliefs and practices often produce strange paradoxes. My reaction to these may merely reveal my personal inadequacies, but I would like to express what I have experienced all the same.

#### Caring.

Those concerned with encounter groups consider it important that the natural ability of one person to empathize with the feelings of another should be allowed to develop freely. I agree, but I also detect strange misunderstandings emerging from this belief: these can be epitomised in the word 'care'. Everybody must 'care' for everybody else at encounter groups. But what if I see that you are genuinely distressed yet I do not care? I will not admit that this is so. The result is often a kind of feigned caring. You begin to cry and everybody instantly 'cares'. You are already distressed and are driven to a state of deeper distress because you can sense that the other members are ingenuine in their feelings.

Somebody whom I love is paying you more attention that I would wish and

you are responding. I feel jealous, but I must not feel jealous because I believe that you should be free to do as you wish. So I deny my feelings.

You express your negative feelings about me and I must accept what you have said because I believe you are free to say what you please. Yet I am hurt. So I deny these feelings.

From now on, I want to admit all my feelings, however irrational they may be, however much they do not coincide with my 'progressive' beliefs, however much I wish I did not own these feelings, however much you may resent me.

I believe in freedom of the individual, yet to what extent will you allow me to be free? At this encounter group I do not wish to participate. You are thrown into conflict. You think that everybody should participate at encounter groups - people need the support - if everybody opted out then there would be no group left - and you have paid good money. Yet you believe that I should be free to do as I wish. You are confused and you start to lecture me, telling me what I should do. Resent me if you wish, but why should I live up to your expectations? Your demands that I should participate occupy my mind to such an extent that I lose the spontaneity of wanting to join in.

## Techniques and Practices.

As well as certain beliefs, encounter groups have acquired various techniques and practices. These usually work, but once again problems can arise.

Helpful techniques are numerous - 'Do not comfort the person who is crying profusely because it will cause him to smother his feelings. It is best to simply place one hand upon his shoulder at this stage to show support'. This is perfectly sound advice, but techniques such as this can become mechanical. I am distressed and I feel that I am merely going through the ropes - in a minute you will place your hand on my shoulder - but I want to be important as an individual, as a person.

From now on I want to keep in mind techniques that I gain from watching others and from my own experience, but I want to judge every situation anew, acting spontaneously.

Consequently, I do not want to work on my problems because I will not work with people whom I cannot trust and I cannot trust people who only pretend to care. I have often experienced this process. From now on I want to be honest and admit when I do not care for somebody. Perhaps those that do care could then work on the individual's problem. I am sure he will achieve far more when he cannot feel me pretending to care and feeling bored.

Talking of boredom, I think this is a very real problem at encounter groups. Yet again, I feel I must 'care', so I sit resenting you because the two-hour-long analysis of your dream bores me to tears.

I understand that in America there is a tendency for the group's attention to move fairly quickly from one person to another, spending less time on individuals. In this way, people are less

likely to be lulled into boredom (or sleep) because things happen fast in this more dynamic atmosphere. I don't think the individual will suffer either, because whilst other people are working they trigger off my own feelings, touch upon my own defences, and when my turn comes I am ready to jump in at the deep end.

## Freedom.

Next after caring in order of importance comes freedom. 'You do your thing and I do my thing,' etc. Once again, I agree. Yet I am now so concerned to allow everybody to do precisely as they wish that I pretend I do not care if you do something I dislike. I must accept you as you are.

Finally, a common practice is the co-counselling session where the group divides into pairs and each pair report back to the group after the session. I must introduce my partner to the group, or report what I have learned about my partner. I dislike this practice because I feel that I must remember most of what my partner says in order to do him full justice in front of the group. The co-counselling session for me therefore becomes more of an intellectual effort than an emotional experience. I could refuse to talk about my partner, but then the group will not get to know him and he may suffer. I feel I have to be responsible for him. I would prefer to report only what I learned about myself during the session, then I can be responsible only for myself. If I choose to say nothing, only I suffer.

These have been my own experiences and reflect my personal conflicts. I know that conflict is good for me. From a state of frustration I know I can reach an 'impasse' and then find my own way out of my problem. I think, however, that some of the conflict occurring at encounter groups is unproductive and best avoided.