

autonomy is threatened at the expense of the wholesale processing of 'products' on an assembly-line basis.

The development of Humanistic as a Social movement, however is encouraging. As a theoretical model, its propositions are as hopeful as they are positive. Wider social benefits can be promoted by the removal of barriers that prevent the growth of the self. It is likely that as an individual experiences warmth

and acceptance, he will learn to see himself as an acceptable person and in turn become accepting of others. The task of the teacher seems clear. Do we want our children to become fully-functioning, spontaneous, free and creative or conforming, defensive, and distrustful? If as teachers we can help them to appreciate the importance of being a person then we will have played no small part in equipping them to live in the world of *their future*.

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W.N. Owen

Personal Change through Encounter

Last year I was a psychology finals student faced with the task of producing a piece of original research for submission to assessment. Unable to stomach the strait-jacket of a classical experimental design and classical rat-man subject matter, I started looking for something with personal meaning and human relevance. I had taken part in an Encounter Group quite recently, and this had been a very powerful experience. But I was besieged by sceptics' questions and unable to give confident replies

concerning any real and lasting value in the experience, or personal change genuinely effected. A friend suggested we might do a project together to measure people's change or development in some way, if any such change was going to occur. We managed to get together enough people for two Encounter Groups for the following term, easily enough. The difficulty was working out some kind of method that would be both acceptable to human beings in human terms, and also technically and theoretically

acceptable as measuring personal change.

My friend had heard of other people's research with on-going Encounter Groups using Kelly's construct Theory. Our first tentative steps were made in this direction. There were a number of clear-cut objections to this approach, however. Firstly, construct grids had failed to register considerable changes in personality as experienced by the people who had been taking part in that on-going group. (The grids must be insensitive in some way!?) Secondly, the form these grids would have to take would need to replicate themselves along one axis in order to make the measures comparable. Such a framework, we both agreed, was too constricting. Thirdly, there would be a lack of depth in attempting to work out personality pictures of people from rigid construct, very limited element grids. To work out personally meaningful grids for even a small group of people on two separate occasions, let alone a second control groups, was out of the question in terms of time available. Having ditched Kelly, Jeff and I went our separate ways in terms of method.

At Christmas time, still without a method, I felt well and truly sunk. But a glimmer of hope appeared among the pages of a book I chanced to pick up - *'The Interpersonal Perception Method'*, by Laing, and it contrasts strongly with these other works in being a practical manual for social research. It sets out a system, which the authors have tested with a number of disturbed and non-disturbed families, for laying bare the spiral communication networks that give individuals their identities. The I.P.M. has a formal grid system based on a complex questionnaire replies onto the interpersonal grids, which yield an overall picture of a two person relationship. I almost gave up trying to work the system

out and, when I had done so, I was almost defeated in the slog of copying out grid sheets from the model given in the back of the book. (You can get copies from the Tavistock Institute, I later discovered, but they are very choosy about who they give them to, since they turned down a request from Keele's sociology professor).

Anyway, eventually I worked out the whole system. (Read Laing's *'Self and Others'* for the theoretical explanation of what it's all about). Next I had to explain it to the people who had agreed to make my project an extra personal endeavour on top of the Encounter Group they had chosen to do. I was working with four couples, with at least one person in each couple doing a group. Only one of the four was a married couple, incidentally.

My research design was to work out four profiles, prior to the Encounter Group, each giving a more or less complete outline of these people's identities as revealed in their closest pair relationship. This pre-test could later be compared with a second set of profiles, taken some time after the Encounter Group experience. This format conforms, in one sense, to a very simple 'academic psychology' experimental design. The test, in this case the long questionnaire, remains unvarying, leaving the responses of the people involved as the single independent variable. However this is not objective quantifiable data collecting. It is a working out of individual profiles for couples, that must be meaningful to the couple in their own terms to have any further validity. People involved must first know just what they are doing. The whole process must be existentially meaningful to the people taking part. It must be part of their own experiment with life, just as going to an Encounter

Group is an existentially meaningful experiment with life.

Having said all that I must now admit that in some respects the project was a failure. I had grid profile copies made for everyone who took part, so that everyone could see for themselves just how they stood in relation to the partner how things had changed from pre-test to post-test, what change was shown in the overall relationship, and what had happened to everyone else. Everyone was familiar with Laing's existential phenomenology. Everyone knew what they were doing with the questionnaires. But most people had not read and understood the I.P.M. itself. They could not decipher the grid scores properly.

I arranged an evening meeting for the eight of us. (I was taking part myself). One member of our group was not available, but the seven of us had an enjoyable meal. Afterwards I faced the major task of explaining to everyone just how to interpret the profiles in front of them. Eventually everyone was in the picture, so to speak, and we went through the profiles together.

I was dissatisfied with the outcome, however. The tape I made of it shows the discussion as somehow glib and almost academic. This should have been a very high-powered encounter, each of us with our selves exposed for critical examination. People were withholding those crucial facts that would have put flesh on the bones of the I.M.P grids.

Everyone needed more time to look at the grids before coming back for a full encounter. I did not assert myself at this meeting, however, nor did I indicate further directions. Afterwards, I worked out my analysis of the four changes. Time was short, pressures were great. I submitted my write-up, and stopped thinking about the project. On looking back I am dissatisfied with myself for not setting up that last session better and not taking it further. One of the pairs has broken up. I must now try to do justice to the project by finding out how the others have dealt with or put aside their profiles. I must send them my analysis, which I have neglected to do. This type of research has scope for much learning and growth for all those who take part, with no specific end or cut-off point.