

Valerie Rose

GROUP LOVE

I am thinking out loud about the ephemeral nature of love that is experienced in a group or workshop. During the group process (in any growth group) so much outer crust of defence is dissolved and the essential person is revealed. It is natural for essential people to relate in love. We are not so used to encountering others' essential natures, and the vividness of their revelation together with our own diminished ego structure quickly allows people to come together as though along a channel of warm light.

This is good: but is it real in terms of the ordinary world? When we love in the ordinary world our demands and expectations and guilt or whatever are probably more in evidence, and may even match those of the significant other, so there is a good chance that they may be accepted along with our love. For example, if attached to my feelings of love are strains of dependence and resentment I might attract the love of someone with a need to patronise and tolerate, and I will consider this an excellent match. If the other does not complement these attachments I shall be disappointed and say we are incompatible. Or if he grows out of these needs I will say he no longer loves me.

It came as a shock to find that love expressed in a group sometimes did not survive the journey to the street, or even half an hour in time. Indeed, I have labelled people 'group lovers', cynically observing that they only find it possible to allow their love within the safety and protection of a group. I thought I was applying the reality test when I watched the frail feelings evaporate in the fresh air or when faced with the problems of

everyday life, and decided the whole thing had been an illusion.

Nowadays I would say that love in a group is HereandNow love. It can be the truth of the way I feel right now, but may or may not be true ten minutes hence. I want to be free to express it but do not want any expectations or obligations hung on it. It is not a proposal to the receiver but rather an expression of the giver, and it lasts only so long as it lasts—so long as there is energy in it. Like all forms of organic life its vitality is in its spontaneity and it cannot be captured or preserved without being spoiled. I now want to take this principle out of the group and into all aspects of ordinary life—this is a very scary thing to do, to really be with what is happening.

There are some useful terms in use such as '*I have a lot of love for you*', '*I feel very loving towards you*', which define the feeling but exclude the stickiness which can adhere to a declaration of love or which pervades the atmosphere of groups in which people are encouraged to 'act loving'. The likelihood of misunderstanding what is happening in a group or between a pair of co-counsellors may have prompted Harvey Jackins 'blue page' rules in the Re-Evaluation Co-Counsellors Manual, though this seems a bit too authoritarian.

Love in a group can be one of the big learning experiences or a very painful one—painful as in any high energy situation the participant can be very exposed. Though it is a wonderful opportunity to meet love in a pure form and get a glimpse of what it can be without the attachments we unconsciously relate to the loving experience.