

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Participation

What do we do when we've grown a bit? My brief excursion into the Humanistic Psychology movement leads me to expect the answer "grow a bit more". But I don't find this satisfactory. For the past 30 years I have made sporadic attempts at what I understand by growth, releasing some of my repressed dynamics, and each time I achieve a little success there follows a period of re-adjustment to other people to allow

that newly found part for me to find room to express itself. I modify my role with others which call upon them to modify their roles to me. Sometimes this leads to a fuller relationship, sometimes to an equal but slightly different one and sometimes to a more distant one or even a severing of relationships.

This, no doubt, all sounds very straightforward and a normal attribute of living, but it can feel very tense and bewildering, especially if the new persona leads to a clash with the cultural norms of

interpersonal behaviour. Being led into an unaccustomed role in adult life can be very difficult, everything is new and there is a lack of intuitive knowledge of how to see it through when others respond unfavourably. Being new it has not yet been proved, so, although there may be a happy feeling that it will lead to more fulfilment all round, there will probably also be trepidation and uncertainty. For example, if a little bit of growth has led to a rejection of authoritarian management in favour of greater participation it is perplexing and frustrating if the rest of management doesn't see the point and the managed show no enthusiasm for getting involved. Restrictive social customs must have nipped in the bud many a promising bit of growth!

Which leads me to suggest that as well as the present activities of this movement there is a need for participation workshops designed to help people consolidate their insights and explore roles to give them expression. What I have in mind is a group, probably small, with a facilitator, which discusses any interpersonal problems its members like to bring forward. The very fact of finding others interested in such problems can itself be supportive and, hopefully, some of the group will have some experience of similar problems and suggestions for tackling or coming to terms with them. In order to carry out this business the group will have to follow some procedure, either decided in advance or made up as they go along, and members will automatically take on roles. The way the group operates and the extent to which it is successful in evoking as full participation as is desired from

all its members can also be a subject of observation, study and experience.

I suggest that the group should avoid excursions into Growth even if individuals believe that their interpersonal problems are largely caused by their own inhibitions. Once the focus of the group becomes introspective then a very special sort of participation is evoked, that of helper and helped, in which the person being helped is encouraged to disclose weaknesses and problems which make them particularly vulnerable. Once more, Growth becomes the absorbing interest and contact is lost with the flavour of everyday interactions. This is not to say that no one should be helped, apart from being told where they can go for therapy. I hope that the whole exercise may give a behaviouristic sort of help to those who need it in that problems can be talked about and called to mind in a friendly, safe and supportive situation and new and scaring roles can be tentatively tried. For others it can simply be a workshop in which to learn by experience and exchange of information.

As learning is both cognitive and experiential I presume that the facilitator would give some brief account of how people do participate in social living; that we look for support in friendliness, appreciation, nurturing, co-operation and benign leadership and for opportunities for assertion in achievement, competition, leading and controlling; that meeting these needs calls for social roles, such as leader and led, host, friend, home-maker, colleague, co-ordinator, administrator, specialist, arbitrator; and that social structures and customs have a profound effect

on the extent that various sections of the community can participate and are likely to have their social needs adequately met. They may be democratic or autocratic, flexible or rigid, authoritarian or permissive, just and caring or harsh and punitive, encouraging community feeling or divisive.

But, of course, we are not individually free to choose our social structures and it is not sufficient to demonstrate that a change would give rise to greater participation and general fulfilment. There are always obstacles in the way of change. Those who enjoy the delights and privileges of power seldom see any advantage in surrendering it and those who have learnt how to succeed in a particular milieu are worried that they may do badly in a different one. Even those who just manage to keep their heads above water may be very anxious about any change as it would require so little to push them under. But,

nevertheless, change, usually slow, is a continuing phenomenon and one of the things that brings it about is a change in peoples' views and aspirations. Mood is infectious, so if enough people appreciate the pleasure of full participation it may create an irresistible demand for changes in the social structure, large and small. Even without changes in the formal structure there can be a radical change in social atmosphere, and informal supportive roles and community activities can be created. If enough people participate it may be possible to by-pass authoritarian figures and so restrict their effective power, even if not their formal authority. And, finally, in a democracy, if enough people want something they will eventually get it.

Yours faithfully,

Paddy Smith
Guildford, Surrey.

Dear Editor,

Invited to a 'Get together' on July 20th, we came with mixed expectations, and it proved a mixed-up meeting. Called for a 'Get Acquainted/Get Together' part of the purpose was a desire by the Secretary to find out what new members want from the Association. Also, how can energy come from the new members?

When we receive kindness, hospitality, the likelihood is that we express it at another time and place to someone else. From the Association we receive help, information, ideas; and the

expression is made in our own lives and in other channels. What is received in a meditation group is expressed as service in other spheres.

As a fairly new member, I find 'Self & Society' full of excellent material; there is also a wide and varied programme. I see AHP as a movement, as an 'umbrella' organisation rather than an institution or another school of psychology. Do not turn too much time to organisation structure or to membership building. Be practical, of course. Feedback from the membership can be obtained by wider use of checklists from those

attending events (The Industrial Society are very good at this). Be sure that the right questions are asked. New ideas should be given a warm welcome, but without the officers constantly looking over their shoulders. Those running the Association should be responsive to the membership, but not attempt to manage by referendum.

The general membership is probably content to let the Steering Committee and officers do the work. If you concentrate on the 'HP' the 'A' will take care of itself.

Yours sincerely,

Ivan Brown
Banstead, Surrey

Dear Vivian,

I am conducting a survey into inter-agency cooperation in the local community. We would like to know what treatment or help is available to those with psychiatric problems, either before these problems become so serious that they require hospitalisation, or after discharge from hospital. We would like to know how doctors, social workers, health visitors, community nurses, voluntary bodies or others see their own role and that of others in providing this service. How much use is made by general practitioners of social workers, for instance, or vice versa? Where do patients/clients go in the first instant and why?

If you have any information or have any opinions on the subject I shall be very glad to hear from you or from readers of your journal.

Yours sincerely,

Hans Lobstein
Ass. for Self Help and Community
Groups
Ealing, London.

Dear Editor,

I really enjoyed the European AHP Conference in Geneva. But please, may I raise a point. I would like to see a more fitting and objective way to pay presenters of sessions at conference. One full week of board and lodgings in return for a session at conference is a rather generous way to pay ourselves. Sorry to raise this issue but after all, the other participants have to be levied to cover the shortfall created by such generosity.

Could we be more creative and original on this matter? Could presenters be more magnanimous? I really enjoyed the conference and thank goodness I can afford it, but I can't help thinking of all the beautiful people who couldn't begin to think of it. One may need to budget for a £300 outlay next time unless we plan with greater care.

Yours Sincerely,

Pat Mortell
Limerick, Ireland.