

and ideas which come up. Although when I facilitate groups now I probably do not actually do anything different, I do have a fuller and richer sense that being a group

facilitator or member is to be part of a complex and dynamic world, and that groups are microcosmic versions of our wider social system.

Group Processes

John Rowan

Angry

Yes, I was angry.

Through the whole meeting I felt the blood coming into my face,
the anger mounting inside me.

I let it off first at the two ladies — the one I thought was
Miss W. was Miss M., and the one I thought was
Miss M. was Miss W.

I let it off to the doctor — only I must call him Pierre from now on —
but it was still there at the end.

I was still angry when he stalked out the door on the dot of 7.30.

I think I was more angry than the group wanted me to be,
but there was a lot of coming-out-from-behind, and I think
I helped that.

Tonight, the group seemed more alive.

Fantasy I

I just want you to open up a little bit, to be just a bit more warm and accepting.

I felt you last time as rejecting and hostile, and you made me feel more rejecting and hostile to you.

It is not you personally I feel hostile towards, but what you are doing to me by your most frequent manner.

You are stopping me being able to concentrate on my own feelings and the group's concern, and forcing me to spend my energy in resistance to you.

I cannot think or feel straight when I am in a state of anger and rage.

What enrages me is your authoritarian attempt to dominate the group.

At first I thought it might be the group doing it to itself through you, but the more we go on, the clearer it becomes that it is you doing it. I am not even sure that any member of the group wants it.

John Rowan, author and practitioner, is a regular contributor to S&S. These poems are reprinted from his 1976 book, The Power of the Group.

There are some who are very willing to put up with it because they think it is part of a plan — that at some point you will smile and say — well it was just as painful to me as it was to you, but it was something I had to put you through for your own good — now we can really work together.

Well let's do a bit of reality testing — is there a plan? Have you got a plan? I don't believe there is a plan.

And if there is no plan, why not give in a little more to what the group wants — let us have an atmosphere in which you are a real member of the group, not a would-be puppet-master.

I don't suppose you can change your way of working completely, but would you please help me by calling me John, or John Rowan, and not Mr. Rowan?

You are supposed to help the group function, to free the group, to enable it to perform better —

But you are not letting it grow, you are not letting it develop —

You are manipulating the group like some bloody orchestral conductor —

Naming someone here, picking on someone there, acknowledging one contribution, playing down another —

Only the group won't do it.

The group won't dance to your tune.

And you can't stand that.

Acrostic Sonnet

Dr Turquet sits there like a Buddha

To hear the developments within the group.
Until one day he lands us in the soup,
Rewording what we say to something ruder.
Quickly he spreads the sails and twists the rudder
Until he strands us; leaning from the poop
Erratically he shouts; we start to droop
Till the whole hull begins to creak and judder.

Perhaps if he would change it could all cease —
I wish he would become a friendly man —
Even if he would try — I'm sure he can
Relax, and help us try to work in peace.
Responding to our needs and letting be,
Emotions will spill out for all to see.



No!

No! I won't have it done to me! No! I won't have it done to the group!

No! That kind of thing is all dead! No! We don't want all that shit!

A leader doesn't have to dominate.

Authority doesn't have to be manipulation.

Power doesn't have to be power over — it can be power with.

Fantasy II

I pick up my chair, and throw it into a corner.

The group is startled, apprehensive.

This group is supposed to study its own processes, but you, Dr Pierre Turquet, have systematically made it more and more impossible for it to study anything. You have done this by neutralising any member of the group who tried to open up and say what he or she was feeling in the group.

First of all he neutralised me — first by trying to turn the group against me, to attack me, two weeks ago, and then when that didn't work, by treating everything I said last week as eccentric and irrelevant.

Then he neutralised you, William, by cutting off a dialogue which was developing between you and James W., and making it clear that your attitude was not acceptable to him — so you were silent almost all through last week.

He neutralised you, James, by adopting you and making you look like someone who was trying to curry favour. At the beginning you were one of the most promising people, I felt, to help get us into some worthwhile understanding, but he successfully stopped all that.

He neutralised you, Joy, by harping on your sex all the time, so that any contribution you made was automatically discounted — not that any contribution was likely, because you had been made so defensive that you probably couldn't think straight away.

He neutralised you, Peter, by putting you in a subordinate position. Even when you said you felt castrated, he wouldn't allow you your own feelings. He had to tell you, in the manner of a teacher correcting a rather dense pupil, that that wasn't it at all, but something totally different.

He neutralised you, Alfred, by just never listening to what you said. The expansive gestures you had in the early groups gradually diminished, your contributions got shorter and shorter, you began to shrivel up from sheer lack of feeding.

He neutralised you, Philip L., right from the start. In other groups you can be forceful and dominant, but in this group you find it hard to say anything at all. He did it to you without even trying.

He did it to the rest of you without even trying. You accepted it. You let him do it. When he was neutralising us you never raised your voices, you never saw that something was going desperately wrong.

What I want you to do, Dr Pierre Turquet, is to admit that you have been doing these things to us. And I want you to tell us why.

And then what I want is for you to treat me as a real person. That will at least be a step on

the way to treating the rest of the group as real people. Only then can I start to treat you as a real person. and not as a symbol of evil. If you can't reply in a way that satisfies me, then I am going to leave the group. I hope others will leave, too, either this week or next. The kind of group you have been trying to create only needs one member.

The Alternatives

If you say something acceptable you're sucking-up
You're homosexual
You're dependent
If you say something unacceptable
You're deviant
You're eccentric
You're talking balls
So keep quiet, you.



Good Books on Groupwork

John Rowan

Tian Dayton, *The Drama Within: Psychodrama and Experiential Therapy* (Health Communications, 1994)

This is a good thick book which covers both theory and practice. There is a specific chapter on working with addicts, alcoholics and the adult children of alcoholics. Psychodrama is one of the basic humanistic disciplines, and it always offends me when books on group work leave out psychodrama. It is so flexible and useful, and can go so deep.

James Elliott, *The Theory and Practice of Encounter Group Leadership* (Explorations Institute, 1976)

This is a self-published Gestetnered book which has been out of print for years, but it is excellent, and I am at present trying to get it republished. It covers the whole

ground of setting up and running an encounter group, and deals well with the theory as well as with the practice. There is the best discussion I have seen of responsibility tangles in groups, and I shall always remember the pithy statement 'Everything the group leader does will tend to deprive the group members of the opportunity of doing it on their own'.

Sheila Ernst and Lucy Goodison, *In Our Own Hands: A Book of Self-help Therapy* (The Women's Press, 1981)

This advertises itself as a book for women, but really it is for everyone. It contains full details about starting up and getting going, and many exercises to use with a full rationale. It is profoundly humanistic, though the authors have both gone in different directions since writing the book.