

Some More Unanswered Questions

1. What's the proper distance from which to view a Van Gogh painting?
2. Why do baseball managers—and no other managers—wear a players uniform and look so dumpy walking out to the mound?
3. Does anyone ever become all they can be?
4. How many restaurants, hotels and cafes in the world are named "Buena Vista"?
5. How many people, in a given hour, somewhere in the world, say: "I'm sorry, but do you speak English?"
6. Why do I continue to buy medium T-shirts when I know that they shrink after the first washing and are too tight?
7. Who first ate an oyster?
8. Why?
9. Are the astrological sun signs evenly distributed among the people of the earth? (Are one twelfth of the people here Geminis?)
10. Will anyone ever build stand-up toilets for women?
11. How is it we can put men on the moon but not make a cereal box that will keep cereal fresh after opening? (Hereby, I suppose, inviting a spate of "How is it we can put men on the moon but can't..." questions.)
12. Has anyone *really* read all of Marcel Proust's books?
13. Is Jacqueline Kennedy happy?
14. If there is life after death, what is Sigmund Freud doing right now? And is his mother watching?

—J.T.W.



JOURNEY

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"Isn't a group supposed to make you feel good?"

John K. Wood

The animated chatter of greetings and cordialities melts into silence - the "person-centered group" meeting is about to begin. After an awkward period of waiting, an attractive woman, looking to be in her late twenties, suggests, "Why don't we go around the circle and introduce ourselves." The man next to her appears relieved; the face of her other neighbor remains expressionless; two persons exchange looks and nod agreeably. A thin young man adds, "Yeh, I would really like to get to know everybody." The middle-aged man next to him, wearing a sportcoat in spite of the sultry weather, smiles and addresses the first speaker, "Why don't you begin. What's your name?" As she is about to speak, a blonde middle-aged woman looks up from the floor and says, "I *really* don't want to introduce myself in this way." The man in the sport coat amends the suggestion with, "People can introduce themselves anyway they wish when their turn comes." The woman frowns. A mood of despair infiltrates the meeting. The young man uncrosses his legs, then recrosses them; the young woman smooths the dress pleats in her lap; the blonde lights a cigarette. The group again falls silent.

Sound familiar?

What is so strikingly familiar to me is not the common individual scenarios of these crudely sketched characters but rather the well-known feeling of confusion and frustration the scene suggests. A group can turn even the most trivial event like this into an occasion for frustrating its members. The group either has limitless patience or no patience at all. If it does not endure endless flat discussions that run in circles, it is completely intolerant of them. Frustration for its members is the outcome in both cases.

This frustration - this feeling which roams between a mild unfulfilled excitement and

total despair, as a response to the group's perplexive, restless, stimulation - is not merely an artifact of the beginning moments of a "stranger" encounter group. It has been my most frequent feeling in dozens of workshop staffs, containing some of the world's leading psychologists. It has been my experience in CSP meetings. And every person-centered staff and communal group I have heard of reports a similar experience. Frustration is the predominant feeling of these groups. Not the *only* feeling, of course. The range of feeling is unlimited and members of these events enjoy many integrative and pleasant moments, but hour for hour, it seems that frustration leads the list.

Oddly, having good personal relationships with other individuals in the group does not prevent these unpleasant aspects. It is a notoriously well-documented fact of group life that the collective often behaves quite differently from its members in isolation. No matter how well I know the persons who compose an assembly, no matter how well I am able to predict their habits and thoughts, I am always surprised and often disappointed by their collective actions.

When I say that I am frequently frustrated in groups, a lot of people look bewildered, as if to say, "Well, isn't a group supposed to make you feel good?" And yet, who does not know that what we call "feeling good" can be derived from experiences and groups which fall short of our standards of organization and composition and, conversely, "feeling bad" can result from groups whose pureness goes unquestioned.

Recalling the positive and growthful outcome or some high point of a group experience, I confess, makes me hesitant in recognizing frustration as the most prominent feeling from group participation. Yet, remembering countless encounters, workshops, faculty and staff meetings where

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Frustration continued

I said to myself, "What am I doing here?" or "Don't they ever learn?" or "You don't understand me," or "That's not what I feel," or when I felt lonely, hurt, bored, or aggravated, I realize that the sum of all these moments far outweighs the peak experiences. Groups are primarily provocative and generate emotional responses in their participants. Some of their undesirable traits - such as the selfish and reckless contagion of crowds - have caused many sensitive people to conclude that congregating is degrading and brings out only the worst qualities of the person.

In spite of countless frustrating moments in groups, I have not reached this conclusion. On the contrary, in North and South America, Asia, Europe, I have been part of groups which have nourished their members and also have taken wise and effective action. Incorporating the emotions, feelings, values, and thoughts of every person who wished to express himself or herself, collectives have reached creative and just solutions for the crises of madness, violence, loss, and threat from without. Groups have developed intuitive faculties for governing themselves, for anticipating the future and living without prearranged structures of time or intention. Some collectives have become, for a time, intelligent teachers and counselors for their members. In these instances the whole transcended not only the parent culture but its own culture. Individuals could be said to have transcended their ordinary abilities. Groups can and do develop the higher potentialities of their members. But not without discomfort.

Individuals have adopted many means to deal with the unpleasant aspects of their membership in groups. Recognizing the restrictive potentials, many regain, in the words of W.R. Bion, well-known group analyst, "a sense of individual independence by total repudiation of the group, and that part of the individual's mental life, which is incessantly stimulated and activated by the group." Others, acknowledging the benefits from group membership, he continues, "achieve a sense of vitality by total submergence in the group."

Both approaches, though doubtlessly taken to alleviate frustration, involve self-deception. One cannot be whole by running from reality nor by remaining unaware of something in which he or she is already submerged - the group. This "submergence," which is really closer to an act of magic, frequently is accompanied by a pollyanna's expectations that everyone should feel good and cooperate joyfully - an outlook that, in itself, leads to frustration. "Individual minds," writes William McDougal in his classic on group psychology, "which enter into the structure of the group mind at any moment of its life do not construct it; rather,

as they come to reflective self-consciousness, they find themselves already members of the system, moulded by it, sharing in its activities, influenced by it at every moment in every thought and feeling and action in ways which they can neither fully understand nor escape from - struggle as they may to free themselves from its infinitely subtle and multitudinous forces."

The group is more than the individuals who constitute it and members of the collection cannot be isolated, no matter how convenient it may be to believe so. Yet, they can be individuals. It is this endless play between the fulfillment of individuality and the transcendence of individuality that accounts for most of my frustration in groups. If I cannot be completely myself, but must conform to the group, I feel frustrated. Yet, if I am fully myself, and the group is unharmonious, I am still not completely satisfied. It takes time to find a harmony in the constellation of diversity which individuals bring to their meeting. Withdrawing from the meeting, holding to obsolete principles which worked at another time, or competitiveness, are individual expressions which are sometimes useful but can block the group's development. On the other hand, insisting on quick decisions and easy actions, intolerance to individual ideas or feelings, appeasing some members, are collective expressions which might be useful but can also suppress individuality. When it happens - and it is rare - when self-expressive, autonomous, persons make up a conscious, coherent, whole, then the collective may become that wise entity it is capable of becoming.

There are benefits to be found in cooperative action. Social scientists, often the last to discover the obvious, have turned up evidence that group performance can achieve and surpass the level of its most proficient member in solving complex problems. For example, in traversing a maze and similar tasks where no one member would reach a solution alone, in predicting the subsequent course of events from the introduction to a drama, in brainstorming creative alternative actions, in making risky and also reasonable decisions - groups outperform their individual members. Groups have been found to have superior learning abilities and more accurate memories than individual members whose abilities have improved after participation in a group learning project. (For no less than 267 research references on the subject, see Lindzey & Aronson, *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 1968 Addison-Wesley, Vol. 4 - "Group Problem Solving" by Thibaut & Kelley.)

But life is not so simplistic. At times, two heads are *not* better than one, and the individual's production is better than the group's. In tasks which require following a

consistent, patient, strategy of solution, for example, the group falls short of the performance of its members acting individually. Centrally organized groups, with easily distinguishable leaders, may perform certain tasks more consistently than bodies not so organized. In some activities group members can get into each other's way, as when pursuing different lines of thought or "contributing" to a discussion even when their comments are unhelpful. When a group tries to solve a problem better left to individuals, naturally there is also frustration and discomfort.

But frustration does not always signal that the unit should turn to individualism for salvation. Disagreement, up to a point, can stimulate thought. Groups can be slow, and even when they are efficient, they may arouse impatience in some members. Dean Barnhund, of Northwestern University, summarizes one of the advantages of tolerating such "normal" frustration, "...Groups achieve significantly better decisions by solving their problems cooperatively than they can through voting or by individual effort. Majority decisions, when all deadlocks can be successfully resolved, can produce better results than are obtained from the averaging of individual efforts."

This "resolution of deadlocks" is an example of a process which is essential in bringing about a superior outcome and, conversely can be the cause of tremendous frustration. This experience of seeking resolution is exasperating and futile, at worst. At best, and in spite of a commitment to my friends and to the goal of the group, the process includes the uncomfortable feeling of trying to catch up with and fathom an elusive conjunction at which seemingly divergent ideas, values, and events become one.

Shirking from a complete expression of individuality or refusing to surrender to one's function in the whole, in order to relieve frustration, dilutes the group's possibilities of executing wise and effective actions and improving the self-knowledge of its members. Personal thoughts and feelings when added to the collective struggle, in the successful instance, find in their convergence a wisdom which is both issuing forth from the members and transcending them.

If you want to feel good, do not count on a group to accommodate your wishes. It may or may not. If you want to gain self-knowledge and know yourself as a part of a whole, it is possible in league with others. You do not have to give up individual initiative or self-expression. You do not have to become a conformist. However, if the members of the group will only be satisfied when the group *and* the individuals have produced their best result, you will probably be frustrated.

Shocking continued

unsettling results was conducted whereby the teacher was not required to activate the electricity, but merely to administer the word pair test. Another subject operated the shock generator. Under this procedure 37 of 40 upstanding New Englanders continued to 450 volts. The teacher, in this case, would not hold himself accountable as he did not actually send the shocks.

(I read that Eichmann, sickened by tours of the death camps, participated in mass murder by merely shuffling papers from a desk. Likewise, the one who dropped the Cyclon B into the gas chambers refused to be held responsible as he was only following orders. The actual perpetrator of evil vanished; only corpses remained.)

Around the same time as Milgram's ordinary citizens were shocking the accountant up at Yale, James Greene at the University of Georgia got together 70 middle-aged adult males for a similar experiment. This was also to be a study of learning. Fifty-six subjects were placed in one room and presented with two levers which, when pulled, produced a pleasant reward. One of these levers was exceedingly difficult to activate, while the other turned out to be quite easy to operate. It surprised no one when subjects lined up quickly in front of the lever offering effortless rewards.

While this group was busy with its task, the remaining fourteen subjects were ushered into an adjoining room, separated from their colleagues by a glass window. The floor of this room was lined with a grid device which delivered electric shocks to the victim's feet. Whenever the easily-operated lever was pulled the fourteen received an electric shock.

As the subjects pulling levers noticed that their neighbors were suffering, 8 out of 10 returned to pulling the lever which did not deliver electricity, even though it presented them with considerable difficulty.

What accounts for the fact that Greene's subjects tended to act altruistically, while Milgram's tended to inflict suffering? Does New England spawn a temperament which is more cruel than that fostered by the South? Can the presence or absence of immediate gratification account for the differing sensitivity of these groups? Could the presence or absence of an *experimenter* prodding the subjects have anything to do with the different outcomes? Does the non-verbal learning task of the Georgians engender greater altruism than the intellectual exercise of the New Englanders?

Though all these questions deserve attention and perhaps one or two is even worthy of study, there is one startling difference between the Georgian group and the Yale group. In the Georgia study, the subjects were 70 albino rats.

—J.K.W.

OPPORTUNITIES

Three POWER LABS, week-long experiences in personal power, are scheduled for England: March 8-12, May 3-7 and Aug. 23-27, at a retreat outside of London. For a brochure write to Ernie Meadows at CSP. Ernie also has two MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOR LABS planned for Southern California on April 18-23 and June 6-11, and a third in Holland August 8-13.

Three weekend workshops are scheduled at CSP for this month and next by John Thomas Wood: HUMANIZING YOUR MEDICAL PRACTICE, Jan. 15-17, SUPPORT GROUP FOR HELPERS, Jan. 29-31 and EXPLORING YOUR SEXUALITY, Feb. 12-14. For a brochure write to John at CSP.

LIVING NOW has firmed up the guest staff for this summer's workshop: Carl Rogers, Betty Friedan, Erv and Miriam Polster, Price Cobb and Colette Dowling ("The Cinderella Complex"). Dates are July 16-25 at UCSD. Contact Gay Swenson or Nel Kandel at the Center for details.

The FACILITATOR DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE is convening training programs in six European countries this year. Contact Chuck Devonshire at Via Ancona 21, Rome.

The PERSON CENTERED EXPRESSIVE THERAPY training program begins in August in Oslo. For details write Columbus Salvesen, Dagaliveien 4, Oslo 3, Norway.

THE LA JOLLA PROGRAM dates for spring and summer are set: "Springtime in La Jolla," April 11-17; Santa Cruz program, June 20-27; "Healing Through Meeting," with Bruce Meador and Maurice Friedman, July 19-23 at UCSD; the 17-day summer institutes, July 2-18 and July 23-Aug. 8, UCSD. For details contact Kathy Walton at CSP.

Three PERSON CENTERED THERAPY TRAINING programs, led by John Thomas Wood, and covering a two-year period, begin this year in La Jolla, July 12-23; Basel, Switzerland, August 2-13; Aspen, Colorado, Oct. 23-Nov. 3. Write John at the Center.

THE ON-GOING LEARNING PROGRAM, to explore and experience the meaning of a person-centered approach, continues this spring at CSP. For details write Valerie Henderson at CSP.

HUMAN DIMENSIONS IN MEDICAL EDUCATION has three four-day programs scheduled for 1982—March 7-11, La Jolla; June 14-18, San Diego; Oct. 13-17, La Jolla; one 10-day program is also set, for July 26-Aug. 5, in San Diego. For details write Orienne Strode at CSP.

THE LA JOLLA PROGRAM IN BERLIN has two workshops scheduled for the spring—March 15-19 and March 22-29. For details contact: Caritas - Erholungsheim, Bismarckstr. 42, 1000 Berlin 39.

Personalized MA and PhD programs in clinical psychology and organizational consultation are being offered through International Consultants, Via Ancona 21, Rome. Alberto Zucconi is the contact person.

Illusions of home

There comes a point in one's life—is it a time or a place, an age or a house you're living in?—no matter; it is a point of consciousness: you realize you can't return to a safe place.

"You can't go home again" is simplistic and profound. You know, at some previously unfathomable part of yourself that you cannot rely on the things, the people, the places you did when you were, no, not a child, when you were a beginning adult. That time when the spark of life was readily available to you and, at the same time, you could retreat to a family or a home or even a place in yourself that was settled, secure and familiar. You could go out and risk, but always with the feeling that there was a safe cave to return to.

Then one night, shortly after the passing of another day, in the emptiness of dusk, you know. There is no turning back to . . . home. Your father is no longer there. Your mother is not the same (or perhaps you see her for the first time). The old neighborhood has changed so that it pains you to see it. But

even these things are only a metaphor for a spiritual irretrievability.

The times in which you were nurtured are only an ethereal web of nostalgia. That time, your time, was some kind of womb to which there was never any return. Even your physical self—your face, your body, the things you knew so well—offer no familiar retreat. There is no turning back. There is no safe harbor.

Then, if you are fortunate enough and gutsy enough to be fully aware, you choose. You either freeze somewhere inside and hold on to an illusion of the way things were; more precisely, the way you always wanted them to be, because we invent our past just as we invent our future. Or you pull your coat tightly around you and, with the abandon and assurance of a gypsy, venture into the world . . . alone.

You go into the world alone and you realize that there never really was a safe place or a time to go back to; there never was a safe harbor. There was only a leaving.

—J.T.W.