

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GROUP PROCESS IN RELATIONSHIP TO INDIVIDUAL THERAPY

Interview with John Pierrakos, M.D.

Kate Kalin

- K. John, will you talk about your feelings regarding the meaning and importance of therapeutic groups and most specifically the Core Energetic group process.
- J. In a sense, the group represents the family and the greater society. It is a wonderful opportunity to understand how each person relates to men, women and authority, and the type of emotions and reactions that person has. For instance, is he dealing with difficult situations by withdrawing or retreating, or is he aggressively trying to dominate the group process, therefore hoping to hide or mask his own weakness and true feelings. The group represents the inner aspects of the person, the man and the woman of each person, as well as the relationships of these inner places of the man and woman with other human beings. It is a very difficult process to truly be able to connect with other human beings. And most people, even when they are highly creative, efficient and very much in control in other areas of their lives—especially professionally—have a specific situation, a specific relationship in the area of the group. In other words, they are very sensitive, they are vulnerable and they distort reality. Most human beings have trouble in the area of the human relation. The group presents a wonderful opportunity to connect with that directly since in individual therapy the person can hide this or withdraw and hold inside. The group holds an opportunity for the manifestation of emotional reactions and interactions within itself. It also shows the kind of relationship each participant brings to life and to people.

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K. If you had to focus on one issue in relation to groups and their most powerful healing agent in terms of uniting, what would that be?

J. It is very hard to focus on one issue, style or topic, because the group is such a composite. It is like weaving a fabric with many threads. It's very difficult to focus on one dynamic. There are principles that I can think of, such as to work with each person and to help each person find his truth and his reality rather than the substitute reality that the defenses bring—to help this person open up to the love that he is capable of. But it is a long way to reach that point because there are other reactions and interactions between members which might precipitate a lot of the other feelings. The group members may be very negative or they may be ambivalent by covering their negativity with the ego mask. So this is what I would say about it: the most important thing in life for each person is to love and be in their truth. Everything else is a distortion.

K. John, you have led many, many Core Energetic groups. Will you share specifically the dynamics of Core Energetics as it manifests within the group process?

J. This process is a very important issue, operating within the concepts of energy and consciousness. First, there is a need to help the group members feel their bodies and their emotions in a real way, to feel which part of their body is blocked. In words, I would start all groups with opening its members physically so there would be enough energy for these feelings to come out instead of being locked in the defenses and stifled as they had been in childhood with the parents. Therefore, this is a very important key which precipitates the beginning “opening up” of the group process. In this physical work the participants are encouraged to feel their bodies, to express negative feelings, and to have the freedom to express all of their feelings through physical movements, and expressions that include both the energy and consciousness.

The diverse feelings in the group are very complicated, espe -

daily because people are not aware of them or they are afraid of them. Therefore, the tendency is to express substitute feelings, not the real feelings. For instance, in a group every person is playing a role like the role they played in their family. For example, a person acts superior. He may have been the oldest child in this family. Or a person acts like he needs everybody to help him, or he holds his feelings and provokes other people to a variety of emotions and reactions. Out of these reactions and emotions there is interaction and communication with each other that happens through verbalizing, feeling the feelings, acting them out and so on. However, this communication very often is distorted. In other words, if a member states that he feels another member hates him, objects to him, whatever it is, that person in affect is really talking about his own defenses. It is he who hates and objects to. If one member responds to another member who is expressing feelings by exploding with strong feelings it is because he is very sensitive about sharing these same feelings and trying to hide and protect them. Therefore, the other person who expresses them irritates or angers the participant who is holding in these strong and powerful feelings.

Another very important thing to be said here is that we very often do not see the reality of other people's feelings, nor of our own. Maybe a very small percentage of reality. But generally we are wearing colored glasses and anything we see we discolor. Unfortunately, this discoloring is not with the colors of reality but with very distorted and unusual colors. We are not really in reality. A man often sees in a woman the threat, for instance, that his mother gave him, the disappointment, the criticism and feel the fear that she initially instilled in him. Therefore, if he interacts within the group with another member, he will most likely react towards the women in a certain way. He might mistrust, evaluate, and test them. He will not see who they truly are. This same process happens within the women. They do not see the reality of the men and might project on the men a lot of issues and feelings that they developed in their early years. As people come together in a group, to communicate with each other and work out the problems, each one speaks a different language. And there is no esperanto. Every person speaks his

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own language but symbolically, of course, it is the inner language we're talking. Out of this lack of communication and exchange they learn what their true feelings are. They learn to communicate gradually, to trust each other. It is very important, in order to trust and communicate, to be able to understand and release our negative feelings. I do not mean to act them out; I mean to self confront and to acknowledge the distortions we have toward men or women. The process of bringing the group members into the depths of their feelings and helping them express their lower self is very significant. Should I describe it?

K. Yes.

J. There are three positions from which a person experiences, feels and expresses. These three positions are arbitrary. One position, the lower self, contains all the negativity that a person has felt in his early years which he is unable to express, such as hatred, creating pain, torturing others, provoking them, and so forth. There is this reality and yet simultaneously there is another type of reality which has to do with the creativity and aspirations of this person, the higher self. Since we have all grown up in an environment that was to some degree distorted, all these three parts of our personality continue to exist in our adult life and from each one we interpret life and the reactions of people. However, the truth can come only when, from the position of our higher or true self, we are able to connect to our deeper negativities and express them.

K. John, will you identify these three levels and specify each of their functions within the personality?

J. The three levels are the mask, the lower self and the higher self. The ego mask is outside of the personality. It protects the person and uses both the negative as well as the creative self. The ego mask creates personality, creates outside manifestations and the expression of life. Then there is the middle layer, the lower self, which is full of negativities and distortions representing the negative self. This lower self is very powerful because it is charged with a lot of energy. Then there is the core or the true

essence of the personality which is the higher self. This is the creative self that everybody longs for and aspires towards. The creative self expresses love, harmony, caring, group consciousness and creativity. The lower self has all of the negative expressions: hate, anger, jealousy, murderous feelings and distortions of all kinds. Ultimately, it is the mask that covers up our whole selves, creating a pretense. This pretense that you are presenting to the world is not the true and whole self. Many times during a group process, I will ask a participant to sit in each of these three positions. Using three chairs or pillows to represent the mask, the lower self and the higher self the member can, position by position, bring forth specifically the elements of the mask, the lower and the higher self as it manifests regarding the specific issue being processed at this time. This precipitates tremendous feelings and lightens the reality and that in affect leads to the way to love and is an access to love.

K. How would you describe a Core Energetic process group to traditional psychologists or psychiatrists, who for the most part do not include the aspect of energy, especially expressive energy in their mode of treatment?

J. Exactly the way I described it. It is the essence, it is very correct. It is looking at the situation from a different perspective. In psychiatry and psychology patients wander from the mask to the lower self, from the lower self to the higher self without taking hold of those qualities and directing them. They expect all of those things to come out spontaneously and therefore they keep repeating in one form or another. But because they are not conscious, the energy of these emotions are not being organized into a creative movement. They keep repeating the same things. If you organize in the manner I describe, even if your feelings are negative, you will transform them.

K. What is your opinion regarding organized groups of people who come together for the purposes of presenting themselves or ideas such as the women's or gay rights movements?

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J. Do you mean average people?

K. Yes, anyone who might unite with others in mutual beliefs. And also do you believe that the cause, whatever it may be, originates from an individual issue and is there generally a lower self aspect of these personalities as they develop for this cause?

J. The deepest and most important issues in us are not philosophies but our individual issues. Our individual issues create the issues of the city, and the city creates the issues of the bigger city and the bigger city of the nation. These so called social issues exist in every person. If you do not want to see them then you might generalize in philosophies. However, at the root of evolution is the individual process.

K. So it is very possible that the politically active person or one who is active in a social cause might be indirectly processing his individual issues and therefore justifying his lower self?

J. It depends how he does it. If he does it blindly he will not get any benefit from it. But if he sees his motive and is moving for people who are destitute and hungry then he certainly sees the issues of other people.

K. For the most part groups are formed for the purposes of healing, uniting or mutuality but this is not always the case. Therefore, if a group is formed for the purpose of aggression or power is that energetic force the same as the uniting force that brings people together for healing?

J. No! You see the aggression has to be gotten out and the cruelty has to be recognized, but power, control and push never create harmony. If there are transitional steps to bring out the other feelings then, yes. But if they are acted out again and again they create disharmony and chaos. It is important to see in our body and attitude, which of those feelings are chaotic. You know which feelings are absolutely uncontrollable and the purpose they have and which are the feelings that you want to work with.

- K. So that the source of the drive of any group's purpose might originate either in the lower self, the higher self or mask self?.
- J. Right. Everything that happens in us is very important because it is the way to our evolution. We should not complain about the difficulties we have and act as victims. We should really look at these things and say, "How did I create them, how am I responsible, what am I doing?"
- K. Regarding group leaders, for example, Hitler, who had such tremendous influence on so many thousands of people, resulting in so much destruction and suffering, what was it that motivated him, drove him to where he was able to hook in such an enormous alliance of destructive and negative energy? What was it that was magnetic about his energy?
- J. He aligned with the frustration of the German people, their suffering, fear and humiliation. They were defeated in the First World War, and there was a lot of suffering, inner blame and humiliation. He exploited these aspects of the German people, using the opposite concepts. Instead of being a victim he became an aggressor, which is a psychopathic expression of life. He didn't accept his life and turned it around and said, "I am this way because you did it to me and you are responsible."
- K. Often times in a therapeutic group process if one person starts to process or emote, others will eventually start to have an intense release of emotions which may not be the same. Is that energy the same, regardless of the degree of intensity, that happens if you have a powerful psychopathic leader like Hitler influencing people, its members influencing each other?
- J. The energy is similar because you drive the energetic system, but the consciousness is not of love. It is a consciousness of hate. It is not only what you say but how you say it. Hitler would say, "They took this part of us, they tortured us and they stole Dansick from us." They acted like victims while they produced the war to begin with! It is important to emphasize that another person can express the same feelings, but they sound and feel

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different. The difference is whether they are coming from a place of love or a place of hatred. A person who expresses negative or critical feelings from a place of hatred is poisonous. This subjugates other people because they feel that.

K. Aside from all of the positive advantages and progressiveness that resulted from the women's movement do you feel that a lot of that movement was related to lower self rage against men as, say, a gender issue.

J. When the women's movement started Betty Friedan wrote a book, *The Feminine Mystique*. And in this book, directly or indirectly, she blames men for the plight of women which fired a lot of feelings for many people. The movement now has turned around. In her second or third book she recognizes that women are very angry about their plight. But it is not men who are doing it to women. The women capitulated and are angry at having betrayed themselves.

K. And the betrayal is because of the giving over of the power.

J. Right, because women didn't take responsibilities and because of the nature of the men who say, "Yes, I like it this way." The man does the work and makes the money, especially in previous centuries. The woman stays home with beautiful furniture and takes care of the kids. She cannot be equal in that way. Then the man says, "I did it, who are you? You are here to serve me. When I go away I will put a chastity belt around you and lock it."

K. So they feed into each other?

J. They feed into each other from a different position. The man is like an omnipotent child who wants everything. There is a certain immaturity in a man. He wants to grab and get and this starts from the way his mother exploited and used him. Then he becomes aggressive and he is afraid to have feelings. If he has feelings he will crumble. He is not a man. He should not cry. He should be tough as steel, be a killer, to control and grab. And that is the mass image of man. The mass image of woman

is that she is inferior, not as intelligent as a man. You cannot count on her because she is so emotional and cannot stand up to the man and she is inferior mentally too. This mass image is very destructive because people grow up with it and acquire these attitudes.

K. And so this becomes part of the collective unconscious?

J. Yes, unconscious and conscious. Because it becomes manifested in your life.

K. And you said that all images are negative. They are not reality, they are distorted.

J. Yes, the images that man has is that his mother wants to use him. She needs him and wants to grab his power, his control. She wants to manipulate him, says goodie, goodie and then criticizes him. She confuses him and takes his strength. So he won't allow that of any women. He will be in control.

K. I have the sense that when you talk about the male and the female and the images that this might be the crux of all of the fighting between the sexes and again these groups and these social issues. Do you feel that this is all about a gender issue?

J. The crux is that every man has a woman inside of him and every woman has a man inside of her. If you have problems with that woman over there, it is because you have problems with the woman inside of you. It is an inner disturbance. Any outer situation is the manifestation of this. If a man has an image or idea that he should be tough and strong he will obviously have contempt for his sweet feelings and for himself for having these soft, sweet feelings. He is in trouble if he cannot accept these feelings because he cannot accept the woman. He wants to dominate the woman and not connect to her heart. So the real problem is the inner problem, the outer is the manifestation of this.

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K. In terms of evolution where do you think that we are in terms of male/female relationships?

J. In this century there is tremendous exposure of all the feelings that have been repressed and suppressed. They are much more on the surface now, most of them negative. In the United States, for example, there are 2 million divorces. We are acting out a lot of feelings again and again and we are not organizing or integrating them. There is a tremendous outpouring of all the feelings that were previously suppressed and denied. And this creates a tremendously chaotic situation because the feelings are out in the open and they are not integrated. However, it is better to have feelings out even if they are not integrated than to have them secretly hidden. What creates war is people not dealing with their lower self! When you hold in your lower self you are a bomb. And many people in the society, the community and the nation are holding in their negative feelings, not taking responsibility for them, acting them out at times and then it is like an atomic bomb.

K. So the more it is held the more intense or the greater the manifestation?

J. Right.

K. Do we ever get rid of the lower self, our shadows, or is it always a part of the personality?

J. You don't get rid of the lower self. You transform the lower self by becoming conscious that this is your lower self, not by blaming yourself for it but by looking at it and saying, "I want to change this." Everybody feels shame about his negative feelings and wants to hide them. From the beginning parents do not give children the right to have negative feelings, so they have to bury them. This starts very early. Parents want you to present only the good feelings. The negative feelings eventually become a torrent which explodes and everybody murders everybody.

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We started with the group. The group manifests all the qualities of a personal relationship. It is the most difficult thing to deal with and especially the man/woman relationship which involves a deep commitment. In the group there is a diluted situation where a man will deal with a woman he is not committed to and vice versa. They try to find out how they can commit themselves to each other and understand who they are, especially to find their truth and to give over to love. Without freedom there is no love and there is no truth. Freedom has to be expressed through knowing your feelings. I do not mean acting them out, but knowing them. If you express your feelings in a way that is organized like a therapy situation or in a situation where you are aware, then you can transform the negative feelings into creative feelings, releasing tremendous amounts of energy and power. Releasing these feelings makes you a lovely soul.

The work that we are doing is of great importance because we are working on all levels: mental, emotional, physical and spiritual. We are working with the body, the emotions, the mind, the will and the spiritual self. We help people go deeper and to integrate. It will take many life times.

We need many lights in order to promote this process. Knowledge alone is not enough, nor is spirituality. The body, the feelings, the mind, and the will all have to be integrated. The purpose is transformation. Everybody has negativities, a mask and a creative self. The important thing is to be aware of all of the negativities and to throw light and the truth on them. Throw light into the darkness, into the personality and illuminate it.

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