

Encounter Groups: First Facts. By Morton A. Lieberman, Irvin D. Yalom, and Matthew B. Miles. New York: Basic Books, 1973. 495 pp., \$15.00.

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Twenty-five years seems a long time for a major phenomenon of society to produce "first facts." In the general field of group dynamics, however, the various methods used to effect change in individuals have been only partially studied. Controversies concerning the type of group activity effective for a certain purpose, leadership style, and the number of casualties produced have never been fully resolved.

During the past few years various reports from the Stanford group indicated that a strenuous research activity was under way to resolve some of these controversies. This text, preceded by these individual reports, summarizes these experiments and sets forth, clearly in some places, and not so clearly in others, the data from a study of a number of groups on the Stanford campus. Taking advantage of an actual experiment not too different from that offered to Kurt Lewin in 1946 in Connecticut, the experimenters set up 18 encounter groups and studied them thoroughly. The groups represented ten of the major theoretical approaches, including those of the basic National Training Laboratory, gestalt therapy, transactional-analytic, Esalen eclectic, personal growth, Synanon, psychodrama, marathon, encounter tapes, and a psychoanalytically oriented group.

The description of these groups—their organization, choice of leaders, and some of the flavor of the action—opens the volume. It is well written and promises the reader considerable illumination regarding the data to be presented subsequently. The middle of the book, however, becomes a heavy and tedious chore for the reader who is interested in the outcome of the groups, the successes and failures and their relationship to group composition and leader activities. A 40-page chapter on "leaders" contains a mass of charts of other data concerning leadership styles, but it is difficult to discover the essential qualities of leadership spelled out in clear English, even in the summary. Basically, the chapter describes a profile of leadership that suggests that the ideal leader of a group, by whatever name, is moderate in his amount of stimulation and shows executive behavior in caring for the members of his group, as well as in utilizing "meaning-attribution." This latter refers to the fact that cognitive input is important to groups, that they receive it well, that they understand it, and it is an important factor in sustaining the effects of the group activity.

Finally, however, in Chapter 16 (if the reader persists or skips to page 422) is a clearly written summary entitled "Implications for Practice," which reviews and revises a host of myths and shibboleths about encounter group training. The first, an important one, is dismissed by the repeated demonstration that "thought is an essential part of the learning

process." Supporting this finding, the authors suggest that the myth, "*feeling, not thought,*" be revised to read, "*Feelings, only with thought*" (p. 422).

Other popular stereotypes are equally corrected, for example, "*Let more . . . hang out than usual, if it feels right in the group, and you can give some thought to what it means*" (p. 423). The data also strongly suggest that "stressing the importance of intense emotional expression did not achieve higher [ultimate] yield" (p. 423). Leaders who demand more feelings through provocative, challenging, and stimulating behavior were, on the average, likely to induce more casualties. The overall data on casualties indicate that a great show of emotions is not necessarily essential. They summarize: "*Getting out the anger may be OK, but keeping it out there steadily isn't*" (p. 424).

The authors reinforce concepts held closely in the early days of the encounter group movement that while persons are important, "*Group processes make a difference in personal learning, whether or not salient attention is paid to them by leaders or members*" (p. 425).

The thorough study of the 18 groups demonstrated a relatively high casualty rate. Some of these casualties, as is common in encounter groups, were unknown at the time of the end of the group, and the six-month follow-up suggested that the additional casualties uncovered were important. The conclusion is: "*Encounter groups can be dangerous, and their danger is not counter-balanced by high gain*" (p. 427).

The comments concerning leadership style are expanded upon considerably. The authors point out the importance of the leader's truly assessing his group, being aware and concerned with his responsibility, at times excluding deviant members from the group, and not only caring for the group, but offering them, in addition to his own behavior as a model, a considerable amount of theoretical and relevant knowledge concerning the group process. The particular theoretical framework in which a leader operates may in many instances be less important than his adherence to a framework. "He must carry with him some framework, though by no means necessarily well-formulated, which will enable him to transfer learning from the group to his outside life and to continue experimenting with new types of adaptive behavior" (p. 439).

A major conclusion therefore is that a well-balanced intensive group experience, with accent on *reflection* as well as experience, and with the focus on both the present and the future application of the present experience, may be a potent vehicle for change.

The "first facts" are in. They support the contentions of many regarding the importance of leadership styles, the meaning of cognition, the actuality of casualties, and the integrating function of the group. They disabuse a series of myths that have grown up to support shoddy practices in the field. The "facts" will be challenged by those who like a freewheeling, disorganized style. (One of the leaders, although paid to do so, refused to participate actively with the research procedures.) They suggest that flamboyance and charisma are not the hallmarks of a great group leader. Let us hope that these "firsts" are not the only "facts" and that they will be sustained, modified, or improved upon in future studies.