

Group Explorations in EGO MAGICK



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This essay explores Ego Magic techniques within the context of a group. Originally conceived as part of a series of technical papers for IOT UK, I am now making this information available for anyone who cares to peruse it, as part of an ongoing series of releases related to magical group work in general. Feedback & comments are welcomed, and should there be enough demand for more information on this subject, I might even get around to writing them.

Phil Hine, October 1997

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Introduction

Awareness and understanding of group processes, which, when you get down to the root of it, means AWARENESS OF OTHERS, requires some degree of AWARENESS OF SELF. Self-awareness is not automatic, nor is it a constant. Exercises and techniques of enhancing Self-Awareness come under the domain of Ego Magic.

Ego Magic is concerned with increasing one's ability to make realistic assessments of one's own self-image and identifying and modifying behaviours and cognitive patterns which are dysfunctional. At least that's the theory. Considering how important Ego Magic/Deconditioning techniques are stressed as being to the practice of Chaos Magic, it's amazing how little information on them there actually is. When one considers the Ego Magic techniques that have been made available through Chaos Magic texts, the following points should be considered:

- (1) It is very easy to make a shift in belief *content* which does not actually change the *process* (the way the belief is enacted) - i.e. a shift from fanatical Christian to fanatical Pagan isn't very challenging.
- (2) It is very easy to rationalise a lot of potentially boundary-breaking actions in such a way that they no longer present a threat to one's self-image. "I let X fuck me as an act of Anathema (see *Liber Null* p48)."
- (3) We are really good at fooling ourselves as to what constitutes, for us, liberating behaviour, and we all seem to share a common human tendency that goes: "I am more liberated/alive/free because I am into magic/wear a bolt through my tongue/leather trousers, than those who don't."
- (4) We're also really good at glossing over 'core' problems with surface behaviour which serves as a distraction from the underlying

issue, but doesn't make it go away. "No amount of fucking around will allow me to escape from not liking myself."

(5) There is a common tendency to avoid Ego Magic as it is often threatening, painful, and may resist 'instant' solutions.

Although there is a tendency to consider Ego Magic as an individual task, it becomes obvious that most actions relating to Ego Magic are pretty pointless unless they involve, at some point, other people. Whilst it is generally understood that social groups of various kinds play a large part in shaping our beliefs, attitudes, values and social behaviour, it is rarely acknowledged that working with Ego Magic techniques in a small group can be beneficial in getting to grips with, and working for effective changes.

How Can a Group Be Helpful?

Group Members can provide the impetus for work to take place and continue

A Group has more resources available (experience, ideas, knowledge)

A Group can provide immediate Feedback to its members

A Group can act as a space for 'taking risks'.

For this project to proceed effectively, participating groups need to be clear about:

1) Confidentiality

Any disclosures made by a participant during times when this project is being run, must be treated as strictly confidential.

2) Commitment

For the project to be successful, participants must want to do it - otherwise there seems to be little point.

3) *Honesty*

Participants need to be honest about their own, internal responses, and honest in their feedback to others. This is a major problem, as people tend not to take social risks, for fear of changing the balance of a relationship.

4) *Ground Rules*

Any ground-rules set up by a group must be adhered to rigorously.

PERSONAL AWARENESS

This introductory module focuses on the development of Personal, or Self-Awareness skills, recalling the injunction made to the initiate to the Eleusinean Mysteries - “Know Thyself.” Most individuals are capable of improving their understanding of themselves and becoming more aware of their motivations.

Self-Awareness

Self-Awareness can be broadly defined as one’s capacity for introspection towards one’s own biography, values, attitudes, identifications, needs and how one’s behaviour is affected by others. It also includes awareness of being an individual, and being responsible for one’s own actions. A high degree of Self-Awareness is generally held to be necessary for one’s well-being.

Although all individuals are unique, patterns of behaviour, motivation and thought are similar and it is generally believed that a high degree of Self-Awareness is necessary in order to understand the behaviour of others. Whilst we like to think of ourselves as unique and different from others, our sense of selfhood is also dependent on our psycho-social environment. If we understand the relationship between self and (social) environment, we are better able to relate to other people, particularly if their behaviour and ‘personality’ seems to be fundamentally at odds with ours.

This module presents some simple exercises aimed at increasing Self-Awareness. Please note that an exercise is successful only to the extent that it provokes some further thought, discussion, or action beyond itself. I have kept theory to a minimum, as I want to focus attention on practical experience.

Module Objectives

- Examine Self-Appraisal
- Recognition of Abilities & Limitations
- Identification of Roles
- Recognising/Evaluating Personal Aims
- Exploring Self-Esteem

Beginning The Module

I have designed this module so that a minimum of introductory theory is followed by exercise sets, each with any support theory required for discussion and clarification. To work through the exercises, one member of the group should be designated as the ‘facilitator’ (since everyone participates in the exercises, there is no leader in the distinct sense). You may like to rotate the facilitator for each exercise set, but please remember, all of you are equally responsible for doing the exercise. The role of the facilitator is to lead-off and prompt discussions, announce the end of exercises, prompt for feedback, etc. Each subsequent Module session should be begun by any feedback and discussion arising from the previous one.

Facilitators should read through exercise sets before presenting them and ensure that any required materials or props are assembled.

Pacing Exercises

I would recommend that you do not cover more than one exercise set per meeting of your group. This gives plenty of time for follow-through work, assimilation of points raised and feedback. Where possible, I have noted an average time for the duration of the exercise,

but please remember that exercises should be followed by group discussion.

Follow-Through Work

You will notice that some exercises are tagged with Follow-Through options. Follow-Through exercises can be done by participants outside of the group meeting, as further experiments in Personal Awareness, and any results can be discussed at the next meeting. Follow-Through work is an optional addition to the main sequence of exercises.

Some Key Concepts related to Self-Awareness

Self-Image

This term is used to refer to how an individual perceives himself, and core elements of the Self-Image include: name, bodily presence, body-image, age, sexuality, dominant roles & identifications. Some aspects of the Self-Image are more important to a person than others: it is more upsetting if these are challenged. How far does a person's self-image correspond with the way he is seen by others? People tend to present a somewhat improved, idealized and censored version of themselves for public inspection, so there is likely to be some discrepancy. Also, some people succeed in insulating themselves from the views of others so that they are unaware of how they are regarded.

Ego-Ideal

The Ego-Ideal is the kind of person one would most like to be. It may consist of a fusion of desired characteristics drawn from various sources. There are varying degrees of conflict between Self-Image and Ego-Ideal, and this dissonance can be extremely complex. Some people, for example, appear to show little conflict - because they

perceive themselves so inaccurately. Furthermore, if a person shows much conflict between Image and Ideal, it contributes to low Self-Esteem, but may also lead to efforts to attain the Ego-Ideal. Such efforts can take a variety of forms. One is to be concerned with the actual attainment of certain standards, ideals or results. Another is to make an intensified effort to project a certain self-image. If the appearance is in conflict with the reality, this strategy will produce further stress and inner conflict.

Self-Esteem

Self-Esteem is the extent to which a person approves of and accepts himself - as himself, or in comparison to others. Like Self-Image, Self-Esteem has a more or less stable core, together with a series of subordinate esteems based on relationships with different groups. Self-Esteem can become quite complex because, for example, some people develop an exaggerated self-regard in order to compensate for basic feelings of inferiority.

Roles

Roles are generally understood as sub-identities which an individual holds in relationship to particular activities, groups or other individuals. Individuals tend to play roles in a characteristic style. The way an individual sees himself in each role is a part of his Self-Image. He may perceive himself vaguely or clearly.

SET ONE: SELF-CHARACTERIZATION

a) Third Person Sketch

Write a Character Sketch of yourself in the third person, i.e. “John Smith is.....” as might be written by a very close friend. Allow 15 minutes for this to be done. After all have finished, each person passes their sketch to the person on their left, and then each sketch is read out in turn.

Points for Discussion: was this difficult or easy? Did anyone feel uncomfortable? Why do you think it might be useful?

Follow-Through ideas:

Write third-person Character-Sketch as though you were appraising your suitability for a job.

Write Obituary as though ‘you’ had just dropped dead that moment. As above, but project the Obituary forwards to five years in the future.

b) Personal Strengths

(i) Each person makes a list of six strengths and six weaknesses that you see yourself as having. Note: you do not have to discuss these in the group.

Discussion points: how difficult/easy was it to draw up the lists? Why? Was it easier to think about weaknesses? If so, why? Discuss as a group anything which anyone thinks, feels or has learned as a result of the exercise.

(ii) Each person identifies and talks about “A strength I wish I had, and what I would have to do to acquire it.”

Follow-Through ideas:

Look at the Strengths and Weaknesses that you have identified. Is there a way that you could use one of your perceived strengths to overcome one your perceived weaknesses. If so, how? Will you do this?

c) Intentions and Outcomes

Choose two social groups that you are a member of:

- i) Why did you join them?
- ii) What did you originally want from them for yourself?
- iii) Have those intentions been realized?
- iv) Have you modified your original intentions?
- v) What are they at the moment
- vi) Divide overall group into 2 subgroups, discuss each other's intentions, and, using keywords, create a list of everyone's desires.
- vii) Compare & discuss
- viii) Discuss strategies for tackling some or all of these ideas

SET TWO: SELF-ESTEEM

It's generally believed that some degree of self-esteem, and also the sense that other people value one, is necessary for individual functioning. Self-Esteem is socially useful. To discount altogether the value that other people give to you, or equally, to be swayed entirely by their values so that you are uncomfortably over-dependent on them, indicates a problem with Self-Esteem.

What we generally need is a realistic sense of ourselves as loveable, in some ways capable, able to give out regard, in some ways talented and skilful, before we are likely to feel secure enough to 'let in' other people's perceptions of us. We may not take them entirely on board, but will at least get a 'feel' of them, rather than blocking them out or rubbishing them.

Being open about having a good opinion of yourself is particularly taboo in Britain, although our Norse ancestors saw nothing wrong in bragging. The heroic boast was accepted as a necessity if someone wished to encourage himself to heroic deeds.

a) Self-Worth

Each person takes a turn in telling the rest some of what they like about themselves. As each person speaks, the rest of the group should be particularly aware of whether the speaker sounds, looks, & feels honest, confident or convinced about what they are saying, or if they are enjoying it or not, and give feedback on this basis. Doing this can bring up great defensiveness, which is sometimes expressed as silence, nervous laughter, or rationalisations about avoiding ego-inflation. It's not necessary (or desirable) to totally focus on Self-Esteem all the time, but it can be useful to check your feelings periodically.

After everyone has taken a turn at doing this, discuss your findings as a group.

b) Anchors to Self-Esteem

(i) Each person lists six things which they feel are essential to their sense of Self-Esteem, for example, “being valued for what I know I am good at”. This list need not be ranked in terms of which is most important - just six points.

(ii) One member of the group rolls a six-sided dice and calls out the number. Then each person in turn discloses that numbered item “I need to be working to feel worthwhile.” Other group members can question this statement, probe for more information, & discuss it.

Follow-Through idea:

Select one of these anchor points and explore, through meditation, visualization etc, how the absence of it affects you. Do this thoroughly, until you can find a way to accommodate for this lack successfully

c) Exaggerations

This is a two part exercise. For the first part, everyone mills around, making eye contact with another person briefly and making a statement which runs themselves down “I can’t run for toffee”, “I can never get to meetings on time.”

For the second part, everyone moves around making brief eye contacts to signal communications, but this time make unqualified boasts, which need not necessarily be true: “I’m speaking at Wembley next week; I’ll get rave reviews.”

Discuss the effects of this. Did people have a harder time boasting than running themselves down, or vice versa? Can wild boasts tell us something about ourselves?

Follow-Through Ideas:

Between now and the next meeting, make a few boasts and a few self-depreciating statements to a cross-section of people. Notice their reactions to this, and how you feel afterwards.

SET THREE: ATTITUDES

Attitudes

What are attitudes? Broadly defined, an attitude is a tendency to act favourably or unfavourably to certain objects, persons, or situations. Attitudes are expressed in the form of Opinions. Opinions are often not as extreme as the attitude which it is an expression of, as most people express themselves in fairly moderate terms. Attitudes strongly influence behaviour, even if we are not aware of them.

Factors Associated with Attitude Formation:

i) Attribution

We tend to attribute other people's behaviour in a situation to their disposition, rather than factors of the situation, although we are far more willing to attribute our own behaviour to the situation, rather than our inherent disposition. Attribution also refers to the personal rules & assumptions (called 'implicit personal theories') we use to judge people.

ii) The Primacy Effect

We are generally biased towards creating attitudes based on initial impressions. This first view, which can be taken in as brief a period as *fifteen seconds*, can be both difficult to dislodge and is often the longest lasting. Anything that a person does in subsequent meetings is likely to reinforce that first impression.

iii) The Recency Effect

If there is a long gap between encounters, then our most *recent* experience of a person, for better or for worse, increases in importance. Note that both Primacy and Recency Effects not only operate for individuals, but also any message they are putting across.

iv) Stereotypes

A stereotype is a set of attributes assumed to be characteristic of certain kinds of individuals. Stereotypes can be very useful so long as they remain flexible.

Discussion

The group discusses the above points and each person should recall a situation in which they were involved, where they can identify the operation of each of the above four factors.

a) Attitude Identification

Each person lists three attitudes which they carry. For each attitude, try and identify its Cognitive component (What I think about...), its Affective Component (What I feel about...) and its Behavioural Component (What I do when....). When everyone has finished, discuss any findings & feelings raised. Note that Behaviour is not always consistent with attitude, and may even be contradictory.

Changing Attitudes

Changing attitudes can be difficult, if only because we tend to actively avoid information which challenges our views, and also tend to continuously be reinforcing our own attitudes, interpreting any ambiguous situation in support of our attitudes.

b) Discussion topic:

You meet up with an old friend who, whilst being sympathetic to magic in general, seems to have a very negative attitude to Chaos Magic. Assuming that you want to do something about this, how would you try and alter this person's attitude?

NB: This could also (optionally) be tried out as a role-play, with one person taking on the role of the 'friend', another the person who is trying to change their opinion, and the other group members observing the interchange. Different people could attempt different techniques, and then any outcome discussed.

c) Owning Opinions

Owning personal opinions, can be at times difficult. We share a common tendency to distance ourselves from our perceptions and judgements and try and make 'objective' statements, or statements which are somehow definitive. This involves the use of impersonal constructions "It's a pity that...; It's good that..." and generalities "Most people think...; We all think; I'm sure I can speak for everyone when I say...".

i) Have a short group discussion on this tendency. Why do we do it? Does it feel good to make general statements? If so, why?

ii) Between now and the next group meeting, monitor your speech patterns so that you avoid whenever possible, generalities and impersonal constructs. Instead, say "I...". It isn't egotistical, it's more accurate. Be aware of how doing this makes you feel, and how other people respond to this. Also, be aware of how other people use impersonal constructs and generalities. If appropriate, try and challenge them and monitor their response.

SET FOUR: ROLE IDENTIFICATION

Individuals all take on a wide variety of roles in society. The roles are interactive and individuals move between them. Each role is accompanied by personal attitudes, values, learned behaviours and internalised expectations. Roles provide an easy solution to the problem of self-image - there is a clear identity which can be adopted. However, they can also be a problem since so much of the self cannot be expressed in a particular role, and a standard solution is to act in such a way that one becomes slightly 'distanced' from the role - indicating that there is more to oneself than can be seen in just this role. We also need to be aware of:

- i) Role Expectation - the norms associated with that role that identify the attitudes, behaviours and cognitions that are required and expected for someone who occupies a particular role.
- ii) Role Conflicts - an example of Role-Conflict is where there is a variance between how you perceive a role, and how others expect you to perform in it.

All of us have 'audience groups' who monitor our performance, for example a doctor has colleagues and patients. There are also 'reference groups' against which we measure our performance. We have to continuously make choices about the degree of significance we give to these. Our behaviour in roles is both a function of personal choice and extrinsic factors.

a) Role Identification

Each person chooses 2 social groups of which they are a member and attempts to identify (& list) the different roles which they take on in those groups. Then each person attempts to identify who in those, are your “Audience Group” and your “Reference Group” in each group. Then identify which roles you enjoy most - and why; and which roles you like least, and why. This is followed by Feedback & discussion.

b) Autonomy and Mutuality

Some psychologists believe that in all groups, there is a varying degree of tension between ‘mutuality’ - the degree to which individuals take on and express the norms of the group, and ‘autonomy’ - the ways in which individual uniqueness is stressed. To paraphrase Irving Goffmann: Our sense of self arises from the walls of society, yet our sense of being a unique individual resides in the cracks.

- i) Each person selects a social group of which they are a member
- ii) Attempt to identify the norms of that group
- iii) Identify how you express those norms
- iv) Identify any way in which you distance yourself from those norms
 - Discuss.

c) Role Negotiation

This is a more interactive exercise aimed bringing more reality into your perceptions of yourself.

- i) Everyone sits with pen and paper in a large circle and writes down everybody’s names in a column on the left of the paper. The rest of the page is divided into 3 columns headed MORE, LESS and THE SAME. For each person present you write a one-word or short phrase to describe what you want more of and less of from them, and what you want maintained.

ii) In the next part, you pair with everyone in turn and tell them what you have written about them and hear what they have written about you. You may have to use words carefully here. At the same time, you have a second sheet of paper divided up the same way as the first, entitled ABOUT ME, on which you write down what everyone else wants from you.

During the paired conversations, you can negotiate with other people about monitoring each other - supporting each other's wants.

iii) Finally, reset the circle and give feedback for discussion. Check if people's self-esteem has been enhanced or lowered.

Feedback Evaluation

Once all the exercises have been worked through, please make a Group Evaluation of the module.

1. *Consider each exercise in turn, and for each:*

- a) Rate it's usefulness for each person on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 = not useful and 10 = very valuable).
- b) Rate its difficulty for the group to complete on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 = easy and 10 = very difficult).
- c) Make any additional comments for each exercise, including any of the Follow-Through options used.

2. *Theory & Practice*

- a) Did you find the theoretical sections useful? Yes/No - Why?
- b) Did you find the division of material into Sets useful? Yes/No - Why?
- c) Did you find the instructions clear, or confusing?

3. *General*

Please make any general comments on the module overall, along with any suggestions for improving it.