

John Moe: I know a good bit about individual therapy. I've gone for years, interviewed a bunch of therapists about one-on-one talk therapy. But there's more than one type of therapy in the world. There's group, for instance. I'll be honest, most of what I know about group therapy, I know from *The Bob Newhart show*. Bob played Bob Hartley, a psychologist, and he had a group. There was Mr. Carlin.

Clip:

Mr. Carlin (*The Bob Newhart Show*): I think I'm overcoming my agoraphobia.

Dr. Hartley: I didn't even know you had a fear of open places.

Mr. Carlin: Open places?

Dr. Hartley: Agoraphobia is a fear of open places.

Mr. Carlin: I thought it was a fear of agricultural products.

(Audience laughter.)

Dr. Hartley: Sorry.

Mr. Carlin: Well, anyway, wheat doesn't scare me anymore.

(Laughter.)

John Moe: Mrs. Bakeman.

Clip:

Mrs. Bakeman: I hope you find your dear husband. If not, get a cat.

(Audience laughter.)

John Moe: And Mr. Peterson.

Clip:

Mr. Peterson: For once in my life, I'll do what I want! I won't listen to anyone! I'll make my own decisions! *(Beat.)* Is that okay with you, Dr. Hartley?

(Laughter.)

John Moe: I like to think group therapy helped those characters, even though they mostly talked in joke setups and punchlines. I don't think it was probably realistic group therapy. I don't think that's what the writers of the show were going for.

It's *Depress Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: “Home to Emily”—the jaunty opening theme for *The Bob Newhart Show*.

John Moe: We're going to look at a more well-earned and realistic depiction of group today. *GROUP: The Schopenhauer Effect* is a new film featuring a bunch of actors playing participants in a therapy group over the course of three very important sessions. It's based on a popular web series, *GROUP*, by the same creators as the film. The dialogue in the film is improvised. Like I said, the clients are played by actors who are improvising. Another actor, Elliot Zeisel, plays the therapist—the facilitator.

Clip:

Music (*GROUP: The Schopenhauer Effect*): Inspirational synth.

Alexis Lloyd: Hi, I'm Alexis.

Speaker 2: Sir, you have to earn your stripes here.

Dr. Ezra Hertzfeldt: What is it you want him to prove to you?

Speaker 2: Well, he has to cry, Doc!

(Scattered laughter.)

Speaker 3: I was so lonely. I was really, really lonely.

Speaker 4: I feel crazy saying this—

Dr. Ezra Hertzfeldt: Outside of here, it would be crazy. But inside here, we're safe.

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Dr. Ezra Hertzfeldt: What's crazy about that?

John Moe: This movie is Elliot Zeisel's first time acting. Anywhere! But Dr. Elliot Zeisel has massive experience—decades of experience as a therapist in group settings. He's a licensed psychoanalyst, distinguished fellow of the American Group Psychotherapy Association. He served as vice chair for the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health. Founder and faculty member of the Center for Group Studies. So, Elliot is not an actor, but he's like the Denzel Washington, the Meryl Streep of group therapy. He knew these patients were acting in this film, of course. But otherwise, he treated them like any other patient saying the things they were saying.

I talked to Dr. Elliot Zeisel, and I asked how he got into this line of work.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Well, the story begins with me being a rather unhappy 22-year-old. I finished college. I was growing up in the '60s. I had the benefit of growing up at a time when we were encouraged to do something meaningful. And I was supposed to be the third generation in a family business. My grandfather came to this country as an immigrant to escape persecution. And he managed to build a business and support a number of families for quite a while. The business lasted in New York for 89 years. My family was in the machine tool rebuilding business.

And the last thing I wanted to do was to be a machine tool rebuilder as a young man. I knew I wanted to be either an artist or a therapist. I knew I needed help. And I started reading actively. I studied economics in college. And after college, I had the benefit of living abroad for a while and taking courses in psychology. And I emerged from that process, again, knowing I either wanted to be an artist, a filmmaker—actually, I was very involved with photography and film—or a therapist. So, I came back to New York and couldn't get myself hired, pretty much for a variety of reasons. Couldn't get myself hired in either industry. Ended up working with my family for about a year. And I started going to school at night for psychology courses at City College.

And I knew after a few relationships at that stage of life, several girlfriends convinced me that my emotional repertoire needed help. So, I got myself to a therapist who I met when I was 22—Dr. Dolores Welber, wonderful woman. And we started treatment. And then about a year into it, Dr. Welber suggested I join a group with her. And to that I said, “Well, that's a nice invitation. But you know, I heard about this fellow named Louis Ormont. And I know I need help in my relationship life with men and women, so I'd like to work with Ormont.” And that led to a discussion of several months, but eventually I did get to work with Dr. Ormont.

John Moe: And who is Dr. Ormont?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Louis Ormont was probably the leading group analyst in the country. His practice was devoted to group exclusively—to group therapy exclusively. And again, I had the benefit of starting to work with him as a 23-year-old. And then we worked together for the next 36 years. I spent 24 years in a group with him. And at some point, I helped him start a school that teaches the kind of group treatment that I practiced, that he practiced—the modern analytic group. And that school exists to this day.

It's 39 years old. It's called The Center for Group Studies. It's here in New York. The contribution modern analysis makes to the field is that it contributes the idea that individual treatment and group treatment go hand in hand. Individual treatment is like being alone in a room with your mother, and group treatment—in traditional terms—is like being at the dinner table with your father and siblings, where you learn a lot. That's how I got my start.

John Moe: Let's talk about this film. It's called *GROUP*, subtitled *The Schopenhauer Effect*. What is the Schopenhauer effect?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: So, the movie is very loosely based on a novel that a colleague of mine, Irvin Yalom, wrote *The Schopenhauer Cure*. And the title, *The Schopenhauer Effect*, is a title that our director, Alexis Lloyd—our very brilliant director, Alexis Lloyd—came up with. It has a connection to the novel, as I said. But it also has a connection to Schopenhauer, who preceded Freud by about 100 years. Schopenhauer was a German philosopher. And he spoke to a number of things that I think ring true in group.

He spoke to the nature of the unconscious mind and the part it plays in our lives, and he spoke to suffering as a feature of life—as something everyone faces, but not everybody faces with any kind of grace. And if group is about anything, it's an exposure to people and to life in a very intense and personal way—where you get to witness and participate in other people's lives, as well as tying your story and helping people contribute to the unfolding of your story as you participate in group.

John Moe: What does group therapy offer that individual therapy doesn't? Is it—*(Sighs.)* What does it do—? Like, a lot of people—I think—listening to this have been through individual therapy. I think very few have been through group. What problem does it solve that individual therapy doesn't, if I may be sort of reductive?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: No, that's a wonderful way of thinking about it. So, it's not so much that it solves a problem; it nourishes the individual. It provides an opportunity for you to come and participate in the process with other people who are not necessarily close to you in age. The groups can range from the membership in a group. It's a little bit like the membership at a good dinner party. Do you ever go to a good dinner party?

(John confirms.)

What happens at a good—?

John Moe: Wide array of people, different walks of life. It's a salon.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Yes. And nobody comes just to eat. Everybody comes to contribute by talking. So, loosely speaking, we have a principle that says you come to group, and you take up at least one portion of the talking time. And you come to

group, and you tell your story. Which is to say: you come to group, and the first thing people want to know is who are you? What's your marital status? Do you have children? What do you do for a living? And what are your goals? What's bringing you here?

And the goals can range pretty widely. Anything that you can imagine. From “Well, I want to finish college,” or “I want to write a novel,” or “I want to start a business and be successful.” Whatever the goal might be, the group becomes your emotional posse. They become anointed in the process of understanding you and what gets in the way of you completing the goal, getting to the goal that you've set out for yourself in life. In a very large way, group is also an opportunity to get better educated about your own emotional life, so that—in the group—you will find in the personalities of the other people your father, your mother, your sister, your brother, your lover, your wife, your husband, your children. The same way those people get under your skin, these people will get under your skin.

And as they irritate you, you find yourself reacting in a fairly predictable way. But then, you see behavior in the members of the group. You see behaviors that are different from what you're accustomed to. And it expands your capacity to tolerate what's difficult. And they model for you other ways of solving emotional problems. So, for example, when I went to a group as a 23-year-old, I had the emotional repertoire that fundamentally I witnessed growing up in my family. My parents fought about the same thing for 67 years. My ability to fight—

John Moe: What was that thing?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: It centered around a number of things. But one thing, for example, was the idea that my father had about the house. The door to the tent was always open. He would bring people home without renouncing them. (*Laughing.*) My mother...

John Moe: Oh boy!

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: My mother did not like that. So, I witnessed people fighting in group for the first time—in ways that I'd never seen before. And I learned from that. I learned that you can fight and not scream at somebody and not overwhelm

somebody physically and not be violent physically and not somatize—not take to your bed and have an ulcer attack. That's where I was headed.

Group demonstrated that there are other ways to solve problems with people. In the same way that people irritate you, they also find a way to love you. You fall in love in group. But you don't see the members of the group outside the room.

John Moe: Right, that's a rule.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Contact is limited to the process that brings us together once a week. So, you learn to tolerate the stimulation of being around people, whether it's love or hate. You learn to be able to put that into words and talk about it without acting on it in a way that would harm you or harm another person.

John Moe: When you mentioned “you find your mother in the group, you find your child in the group,” you don't mean that you're like casting—you know, “That person in that chair, that's my mother figure.” Do you just mean that the things that you get from those people in your life, you also get from group? And it might be among various members of the group?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Yes, exactly. Various members of the group will end up speaking and behaving in ways that are emblematic.

John Moe: Yeah, resonant.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Of what happened to you early in life. Like I said, they get under your skin, and they fall in love with you too—in the same way that you might have experienced before, earlier in life. So, you're not looking at someone across the room and saying, “Oh, she looks like my mother,” necessarily. That could happen. But before too long, she'll say something or do something that reminds you of that mother. And that begins to form what we call in the trade a transference relationship. You start to transfer an earlier emotional experience into the present.

John Moe: So, it's not a matter then of if there are eight people in a group, you're going and getting one-eighth of the therapy that you would otherwise get.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Oh, no, no!

John Moe: You're getting full therapy. It's just coming through other humans.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: One person talks— John, one person talks, they're speaking for five people, six people. It's through the process of identification that a lot of learning takes place in group. That's an important idea.

John Moe: So, who's best suited for group therapy? Who's a good candidate?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: In my mind, it's somebody who's spent some time getting to know themselves first. If you've done some therapeutic work, and you know something about your internal workings, that's a good time to go to group. When you have—like I said—a secure base, you have someone to go to talk about what happened in group. In group, you're not invited to tell your whole story. In individual treatment, we say, “Tell me the emotionally significant story of your life.” Well, you can do that in group to a certain degree. But you can't plumb the depths of your mind in group the same way you can in individual treatment. You could do it some of the time, but you can't have the kind of individual attention that you get through that kind of treatment in group exactly. It's similar but different.

John Moe: I want to talk a little bit about the film here in a second. But thinking about the film makes me think about what you said about groups, which I guess comes down to casting. Like, as a moderator, as a therapist in this situation, what goes into it for you in assembling a group? Like, are you trying to find people who've had completely different experiences or is some overlap okay?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Well, go back to the dinner party analogy. You want people who have some things in common and some things that are different. So, when I construct a group, the age range could be anywhere from 20s to 80s. Anybody can learn from anybody, in my view. And the talking that goes on is unique to group. It's not the same talking that goes on at a dinner party. People are self-revealing and willing to be engaged with in a very profound way. So, unlike 12 Step programs, which are very important to healing, there's crosstalk in this process. We engage people. And we do that—we encourage that—because we want people to have the freedom to do two things: to know their own mind, to know how they feel about themselves in any given moment. But also, to know what you feel toward the other person and to be able to say that in real-time as it's occurring, as close to the event as possible, so that you can learn the art of engagement.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're talking with Dr. Elliot Zeisel about group therapy and about *GROUP*. We'll be back in just a moment.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back with Dr. Elliot Zeisel.

And how did your involvement in this series and this film come about? It doesn't seem like you've done a lot of off-Broadway plays. *(Chuckling.)* How did you become an actor?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: It's a wonderful question. So, my mentor, Louis Ormont, was actually a graduate of the Yale School of Drama before he became a therapist. He was a Shakespearean scholar. He knew theatre. And everything he taught me about being a clinician teacher was grounded in the theatre, was grounded in the idea that teaching is performance art. So, while I had no training as an actor, in growing up in the field, a lot of what we did was to demonstrate what we do. I go to a conference every year called the American Group Psychotherapy Association Conference—the Connect Conference. And as a young man, I would go and watch people do things. And eventually, as I grew up in the field, I started going to the conference demonstrating what I've learned and what I know.

And to do that, you have to be able to talk about an idea. It's a combination of didactic and experiential learning. So, I would talk about a theory or an idea, and then I'd form a group in front of an audience and actually demonstrate what we were just talking about. So, I have a little bit of practice at being in front of a crowd and doing the work. That said, at the meeting in 2017, I was at the end of a lecture, and I noticed a fellow standing to my right with a press pass and a French accent asking a lot of questions. So—

John Moe: *(Chuckling.)* Always a good sign!

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Yeah. And since I was raised in the Abrahamic tradition, I turned to him and I said, “You know, the door to the tent is open. What's your interest in this subject?”

He said, “Well, I'm a French filmmaker. My name is Alexis Lloyd. I live in the West Village in Paris. And I've optioned the rights to *The Schopenhauer Cure*. I'm going to make a film about the Schopenhauer cure.”

To which I said, “Well, Alexi, if you're going to do that, why don't you think about being in a group first?” Gave him a card. Never expected to hear from him.

Two weeks later, he came to see me, told me his father had been a psychoanalyst in Paris, and his father had encouraged him to get interested in group, because he was an only child. And I agreed to work with him, provided he come to group—not as a researcher, but as another suffering citizen. And he could learn about group by participating. Two days later, I went to see my own analyst. You can't do this work without an analyst. You have to keep the instrument fresh by continuing to talk.

John Moe: One-on-one analyst? Or a group?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Yes, yes, one-on-one analyst. So, I'm back with Dr. Welber, my analyst, and we use the couch in individual treatment at some point. So, I'm on the couch talking. And I said to her, “And I was at the conference, and I met a French filmmaker.”

To which she said, “Oh, you met Alexis?”

(John laughs.)

I said, “What!? What?! You know him?”

She said, “Well, he's my upstairs neighbor.” He lives upstairs in this building on West 11th Street and 7th Avenue, and he'd come down to talk to her about the project. She said, “Why don't you go to this meeting?” Of the 1,200 people there that year, we connected.

So, that was the beginning of the project. She is the mother of the project in my mind. And I worked with Alexis for 18 months. He left treatment after a year of working with me back and forth about whether or not I could play a part in the film itself. I was very reluctant to give up my role as therapist exclusively. But after he left treatment and he decided that this can't be scripted; it had to be improvised. You can't script the action of a group with any kind of accuracy. So, he agreed to do it with

improvisational acting. He cast a lot of theatre actors who were great at improvisation. And he used his own writing and *The Schopenhauer Cure* loosely to develop some narrative beats. He developed a backstory for each of the actors.

And then in my office, we trained the actors to be patients.

John Moe: Mm! How'd you do that?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: And we showed up— Well, we gave them this— Alexi gave them this very intricate backstory, and they'd show up in my office in character, come into the group room, and we'd practice at what it meant to be a member of a group. I gave many lectures about what it means to be a group leader, a member of a group. I distributed articles to them. They are a remarkable group of people who took to this very quickly. And that's how the project got underway. That led to a proof of concept in 2020. We put that up on YouTube. It has close to 700,000 views now. And eventually, it led to the making of the film.

John Moe: From what I can tell, you are playing a character with a different name. Is that a character that you're playing? Or are you fully in the moment, not even thinking about it being a different person?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: There you go. There you go. (*Chuckles.*) The character's name was given to me by the cast and by the director. The last name, Alexis selected. Because I think that's in the book. And the cast gave me the name Ezra. The rest of that is just me doing my job. The only point at which I become an actor is in the last scene, the last take of the last scene. We filmed this in hour and a half takes—the length of a group. And it was filmed the following way:

The first day, we filmed the first session twice. It's three sessions. The movie is comprised of three sessions. So, the first session was filmed twice on the first day, the second session once. And the second day, the second session twice, and the third session once. When we got to the third session— I don't want to give away too much, but by the time we got to the third session, we filmed it once. And I got out of my chair at the end of the session, and I looked around the room; I looked at the books, and I walked out of the room. It didn't feel right. John, I do some of my best work in my sleep. I went to bed that night, and I said, “This has got to be different.” And I woke up with a different ending to the story. And the next day I did that scene again.

And in that moment, I became an actor. So, that's the only acting I did in this, I think. The rest is just me doing my job.

John Moe: Yeah. Well, there's a school of thought with acting that it's acting truthfully—behaving truthfully in imaginary circumstances. So, it sounds like that was right on.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Oh, I like that. I like that.

John Moe: It's funny. I was an actor long before I got into radio and then started to specialize in mental health. And I know so many actors who've become therapists. One, because acting is just a rough business. But also, I think there's something about understanding where the emotional grounding is and what the thought process is—

(Elliot agrees.)

—and the experience of being in the moment and truthfully listening and responding that carries over really, really neatly.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: I have a colleague—a wonderful colleague named Emily Nash, who started out as an actress, as an actor. And she was working at some point with Otto Kernberg, who was a very famous analyst. And he would have her sit in on case conferences. And when they ran into an obstacle in trying to understand somebody, they would turn to Emily. And they'd say, “Emily, what do you think?” And Emily could parse this person's character because, as an actor, she understood the internal structure of the person that was being described clinically.

John Moe: When you were making the film, did you engage with the actors exclusively as the characters that they were playing? Or would you, you know, talk to them off the set as the human beings that they were?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: It's a very interesting development. So, in group, we try to discourage outside contact, so that all the emotional action takes place in one room, takes place together. Everybody sees the formation and the maintenance of relationships in real-time together. So, for the sake of treatment, we asked people not to socialize outside of the room. And when we explained that to the cast, they kind of agreed to it pretty quickly. They said, “Okay, we're not going to see each other outside of the set.” So, they adhered to the principle of no contact and brought their character

back to the set for the work that we did together. In between takes, you know, people came out of character. But when they were in character—this is interesting too. When two people in a group in the filming start to have a heated response to each other, because it's improvisational acting, that increase in heart rate—did that belong to the character they were playing? Or was that the person that they are?

John Moe: It gets pretty blurry, because that actor is inhabiting those circumstances.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Exactly right.

John Moe: Yeah, yeah. That's really interesting.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're talking with Dr. Elliot Zeisel. We'll be back in just a moment.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: I'm talking with Dr. Elliot Zeisel.

I want to ask more about groups. In the film, there is something of a timeline. There are events that affect—I'm not going to give anything away—but affect the long-term scenario of the group. How long are groups meant to last? Is it the rest of your life? Is it people coming and going all the time? Is there an aim to it?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Wonderful question. So, groups are open-ended. They're constructed to be open-ended. Which is to say, people stay as long as they're getting something from it. So, somebody may have a goal in mind, and they achieve that goal. Somebody wants to get married or have a baby. They get married, they have a baby, and then they say, "Okay, I've done my work. Time for me to go." Other people stay because they continue to learn about themselves and about the life they're living. And it supports them in a way that you don't find in many places these days—especially living in a big city like New York. People come here from all over the world, and it's hard to find community. It's hard to build community.

And if you build a psychological community that understands you as deeply as can happen in a group, there's no reason to leave. So, I have patients who stay for

10/20/30/40 years in group. The membership can change and does change. But I have— The first group I started in 1978 still meets at the same time on Thursday evening.

John Moe: (*Shocked.*) Oh, you're kidding. Wow. And how many people are left from 1978?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Membership has changed. It's a different group. But you know, there are people in that group for 10/20 years. 30 years. It's a place they get nourished, so they stay.

John Moe: So—okay, so you're in this group. You have this group of eight people. Somebody leaves. How do you go about replacing them? (*Chuckling.*) Like, is there a pile of resumes somewhere? Is it people that you see in individual practice?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: In fairness, they can't be replaced. Because they are unique.

(John agrees.)

But I have people contacting me pretty regularly asking for an opportunity to come work with me in group. Most of the groups I work with now I think of as training groups. A training group is a group where— The analogy I make is it's like an everything bagel. It has everything in the circle. You can talk about people close to you in life. You can talk about the emotional experience you're having in the moment. You can talk about cases, if you're a clinician. You can talk about somebody you're working with. If you're in business and you have somebody you're working with who's giving you a particular problem, you can present that individual and get some understanding about your interactions with them and what could enhance the working environment if you only understood some more about yourself and them.

So, in these training groups, people come to study the method by being a member of the group and learning over time about themselves, about other people. and about me. They learn a lot about me. As I learn about them, they learn about me.

John Moe: So, when they learn about you, do you have boundaries set up for that? Because I know for some schools of thought with therapy, it's like the client asks the therapist, “Well, do you have any kids?”

And then the answer will be, “Well, why is it important for you to know whether I have kids?” (*Chuckles.*) And then they never answer it. Like, how open are you about yourself?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Well, in conjunction with the need to know, we have a principle called the contact function. So, if somebody asks me a question, I might be curious about why they're asking. But I'm fairly transparent. Over time, if somebody sticks around long enough, they're going to know as much about me as I know about them. Which is to say, they may not know my birth weight, but they know how I live inside. They know how I think, how I feel. They get to know me as well as they know anybody in the world.

John Moe: Okay, okay. In the film, there's a discussion about what safety means, what safe spaces mean in the context of a group therapy situation. And the actors kind of—I should say the characters—get kind of disoriented by the things that you say about that, because it's not what they're expecting to hear. Assuming that what you say in the film reflects what you believe, where do you come down on the idea of safety and trust in therapy?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Well, so safety means that they can have the assurance—they're coming to a room—that it's going to provide a structure, a certain kind of containment where the work can unfold. So, that means that I have done my job in vetting people and making sure that everybody who comes to the group knows that this activity is going to be limited to words. Nothing's going to be acted out. So, within the framework of knowing that you're going to stay in your seat, you're going to only use words to describe what's going on for you.

I then say, at some point in the movie—in response to one of the characters in the movie, I say, “I'm not interested in you trusting me. Because trust—If you expect me to be trustworthy in the sense that I'm not going to disappoint you, I'm not going to say anything to hurt you, I'm not going to say anything that is wounding to you—that's just not possible. I'm human, and I'm being invited into an exploration with you in which I'm likely to say something or do something at some point that reminds you of somebody who is difficult for you in life. So, I'd rather have you not trust me to be only a healing force who manages to spare you the pain of remembering what it was like to be involved with somebody who is difficult. I'd rather we entered into this, and when I become difficult for whatever reason, you have the freedom to tell me how

you're feeling toward me and why. And you can expect that I'm going to get interested in that, so that the opportunity for rupture and repair can take place in the process. If I had a panel truck, and I was driving to work every day in a panel truck, the side of the truck would say, "Rupture and repair."

John Moe: (*Laughs.*) Well, that's a big psychological concept, rupture and repair. I've tried to mention it before, but could you explain a little bit about what that is?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Sure. Everybody has what another colleague of mine, Stuart Aledort, calls the passionate bad fit. You have a story, part of your story that keeps repeating itself. Freud called it the repetition compulsion. And things that we don't master as young people, as children, um— We don't take kindly to things we can't master. In fact, the human mind is organized in a way that wants us to have competence and mastery. So, if something has been difficult for you early in life, you're going to find a way to keep repeating that until you get it right. But if you keep repeating the story without new information, you end up with the same ending every time.

John Moe: Yeah. And you drive yourself towards that same ending.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Yes! Yes, yes, yes. Because there's a twisted pleasure in ending up in the same place.

John Moe: Yeah, it's reassuring even though it's toxic.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Exactly! So, in the rupture and repair process, you can bring that to the group. You can bring that to me. You know, the group is the healing force in the group process. I try to make it possible for everyone in the group to play a part that makes them empowered, that empowers them over time to be part of a process that's healing. And I'm there to make sure things stay safe, but also to lend myself to working on issues that have to do with authority figures: the father, the mother, the boss, whoever I represent.

And in that process, again, they might bring things to me that help me repeat with them some part of that rupture process. And as they experience the same difficulty with me that they did with their mother or father, we have an opportunity to do it differently and have a different ending to the process, so they don't end up with the same old story. So, the rupture is their ability to bring what's difficult to the group, to

me, to put it on display, to engage me. And rather than have me respond in a toxic way that they were first exposed to, I have enough understanding at this point—usually—to be able to absorb what they're saying and process it and return it to them in a more manageable form.

John Moe: If you're in a group and someone in the group just bugs the hell out of you, does that mean that group is working?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: (*Laughs.*) Yes, yes! If you can say in real time, you know, “What you're doing makes me frightened or anxious or sad and then angry—”

John Moe: Mm! If you can identify it.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Yeah. “—and angry.” And it's usually some discomfort—like sadness, anxiety, hurt—that precedes anger. If they start with anger, they've skipped over something important. Most people don't want to linger with the hurt. But if you can linger with the hurt and find out why it hurt you, you can find out a whole lot more about yourself and about educating the group members as to who you are.

John Moe: In my experience with therapy—and this isn't a big secret; I wrote about this in my book. But I had been to therapists for several years, different therapists, never got much out of it. And then I realized that what I had been doing was just sort of leaning back and waiting to be fixed. And when I found the therapist that I've now been with for quite some time, it was after I realized, “Oh, this is work! You know, I have a partner here. I have a coach!”

(Elliot agrees.)

But you know, I gotta be running the sprints. I gotta be lifting the weights. And that changed a lot of things. If someone wants to get the best result out of group therapy, what mindset should they be coming in with in order to position themselves for the best return?

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Again, curiosity about yourself and curiosity about other people. If you're open to learning about yourself, and you're open to learning about how people impact you and how you can respond to a range of people who present themselves in a very emotionally available way, they're going to help you know them as well as you know anybody in life. And if you can figure out how to engage with them in a

continuous way, you're going to learn a whole lot about how to get along with a wide variety of people in life. You can do that. You know, life is meant to be lived with people, and often in groups. We go to school in groups, we work in groups, we often end up—one way or another—in some community process. And if you can know more about that part of yourself, you can be an effective member of whatever group you're participating in.

John Moe: The film is *GROUP: The Schopenhauer Effect*. We've been talking with a very, very well-qualified actor from the cast of that film, Dr. Elliot Zeisel. Thank you so much.

Dr. Elliot Zeisel: Thank you, John. Very enjoyable. Glad to get to know you.

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

John Moe: *GROUP: The Schopenhauer Effect* plays in select theatres—and I do hope your theatre is selected—later this month. The trailer's on YouTube.

Hey, we have been doing a lot of work on our show lately! A lot of it having to do with the situation in Minnesota, and mental health, and sort of people's relationship with the government in modern times—whether you live in Minnesota or not. All of this stuff takes work. It takes effort. We love doing it. We love getting it out to you. We know that it's helping you. You've told us that. But it does cost money.

Please become a member of *Depresb Mode*. The donations from listeners, that's pretty much how we keep the lights on around here. And it's so easy to do. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join. MaximumFun.org/join. Find a level that works for you. 5 bucks, 10 bucks a month, whatever, 20 bucks a month—whatever makes sense for you. And then, you click on that, and then you select *Depresb Mode* from the list of shows. Be sure to hit subscribe, give us five stars, write rave reviews. That gets the show out into the world.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the U.S. and Canada by calling or texting 988. It's free. It's available 24-7.

We're on BlueSky at [@DepreshMode](#). Our Instagram is [@DepreshPod](#). Our newsletter is on Substack. Search that up. I'm on BlueSky and Instagram at [@JohnMoe](#). Join our Preshies group, by the way. A lot of good folks hanging out there on Facebook. Just search up Preshies on Facebook. People talking about their mental health, talking about the show. I'm there talking about stuff, and there's lots of pets, lots of pictures of people's pets. It's a good hang. Nice people. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

Hi, credits listeners. The snow and ice have mostly melted around St. Paul, Minnesota. Which means that it's only a matter of days—or maybe even weeks—until we get that one more huge snow that tries to break our spirits. Before I moved here, I thought that the song “Sometimes It Snows in April” by Prince was like a magical imagining of something that couldn't possibly take place. Now I realize it's just Prince stating facts.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”. *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

Music:

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!

(Music fades out.)