

A Concise Introduction to Psychodrama, Sociodrama and Sociometry

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A. sociodrama and psychodrama - general considerations

Sociodrama and psychodrama are like opposite sides of the same coin. Both are grounded in Moreno's theory of spontaneity and creativity and his role theory of personality. (Blatner, 2000 ; Clayton; Sternberg & Garcia). Both use similar methods and techniques of spontaneous role-playing and of exploring aspects of our lives through concrete action. Like psychodrama, the essential goals of sociodrama are greater insight and understanding of human relationships, a more complete and appropriate expression of emotions, and experimentation with new behavior or attitudes in a mutually supportive environment.

However, in psychodrama the focus of the action is the life of an individual, while in sociodrama there is a common theme, issue or situation that the group wants to examine not just by verbal discussion or debate but through spontaneous action. Where psychodrama deals with personal relationships, sociodrama focuses on professional, workplace or public relationships. Instead of a single individual taking on the role of protagonist (the most common situation in psychodrama), in sociodrama the group itself becomes the protagonist of the session.

Thus, a fundamental difference between the two is in the types of roles that are explored. While psychodrama uses as the basis of action the personal roles and life story of an individual, sociodrama gives us an opportunity to explore the roles that we have in common. Thus, in a psychodrama, a protagonist might want to explore her relationship as daughter to her own mother, or as mother to her own children. In sociodrama, a group might want to explore the broader relationships of daughters to mothers or mothers to children within the common sphere of the group.

B. principal methodologies of both

The principal methods or tools of psychodrama include the Double, Role Reversal and the Mirror. Other common methods are the Soliloquy and the Role Presentation/Role Interview.

The double, which is often referred to as the "inner self or voice" of the protagonist is a role which is used to help the protagonist become more aware of buried or partially obscured feelings and thoughts, and to express these in interaction with others. The group member (auxiliary) who takes on the role of double uses his/her capacity for empathic projection to "feel one's way into the inner world of the protagonist." (Blatner, 1996; Dayton; Leveton)

In role reversal, the protagonist literally exchanges with another role in his/her drama and spends some amount of time speaking, acting and feeling from that role before eventually returning to his/her own role. Role reversal provides invaluable experiential insight through seeing oneself from the perspective of another, and gaining appreciation for the views and feelings of the other. Repeated role reversal provides therapeutic opportunities through expanding one's world view (Blatner, 1996; Dayton).

The mirror involves literally "stepping outside of a situation." The protagonist moves outside of the scene of action to view it from a distance and gain fresh perspective on a situation that has become confused, intractable or overwhelming. Typically the protagonist chooses another group member (called an "auxiliary ego" in Moreno's terminology (Moreno), but now condensed to auxiliary) to stand in his/her place inside the scene (Blatner, 1996; Dayton). Mirroring often leads to a dialogue between the protagonist who is both "in the scene" and outside of it in mirror

position, with role reversals. Zerka Moreno often refers to the mirror technique as "becoming one's own therapist." (informal communication in many workshops)

Soliloquy is used in situations where the protagonist is alone in the action space, either before or between action scenes (Dayton). Similar to the theatrical convention from which it is taken, the protagonist is asked to speak aloud thoughts or feelings which s/he is experiencing in the moment.

In the role presentation, a group member takes on a specific role and introduces him/herself to the group in that role. The role may be an aspect of that person, another person, an animal, a substance or an abstract quality, among others. The person spontaneously conveys whatever s/he feels in worth knowing about this role, then leaves the role, termed "de-roling," and returns to him/herself. The type of role selected can vary from casual to deeply serious. A few examples include one's favorite food or color, a favorite artist or work of art, a family member who is very close or from whom one is estranged, and so on. Role presentation by itself can be used as a warm-up to establish connections and spontaneity early in the group process. It is also typically used in the warm-up to a psychodrama, for the protagonist to give an initial impression of a role to the group member who is going to play that role.

The role interview is an extension of the role presentation. The director, and other group members, when appropriate, ask questions of the person in role to gain further insight into the nature of that role, and to help the role-player become more spontaneous. At times during the action of a drama, the director may decide to freeze the action temporarily and to conduct a role interview with the protagonist in a particular role, as a means of helping the protagonist to gain insights that will unblock conflict or pave the way for a shift in the power balance of that relationship.

Psychodrama works with the contents of our imagination, providing an opportunity to see, feel and even touch some of our inner images by bringing them into concrete, physical reality. This world of the imagination, both concurrent with and beyond our ordinary everyday reality Moreno termed "surplus reality." Through the transformative power of surplus reality, we can give voice to objects that have emotional meaning for us, dead or absent parents, friends or family members, even animals [including pets]. In the words of Zerka Moreno

"... Moreno noted that the reality of the fantasy produced by children and insanes went way beyond what he could conceive. That production he called surplus reality, and he sensed that it was out there somewhere, projected by the minds of such individuals; s to whom this belonged. ... it was his task to make it come alive so all could share in it He knew he could not meet the fullness of the psyche unless he lived in this surplus reality along with the patient." (Z.T. Moreno, 1995)

All of these psychodramatic methods are applied in sociodrama as well. While there is typically not a central protagonist in a sociodrama, there may be a central role around which the action revolves. One example of this is a multi-scene sociodrama I directed in the 2005 NTTW training on the theme of sociodrama applied to HIV/AIDS. The central role was defined as a person who had recently become infected with HIV. The remaining roles which the group defined were all related to this central role, e.g. parents, girl friend, social workers, employer, fellow workers, and the strong antagonist role of The Person Who Infected Him. Not surprisingly, the initial spatial configuration was with the HIV-positive role in the center and the remaining initial

roles clustered around him in a circle.

Even if there is no central role, it can often be very productive to provide any role with a double in order to bring into the action thoughts or feelings that this role might prefer to keep hidden. Likewise, role reversal is a powerful tool in any sociodramatic situation; and mirroring can also be used to help a given role experience new perspective. In sociodrama also, the audience (group members not immediately playing a specific role) often serves as a “mirror” by engaging directly in dialogue with one or more roles in the drama, and even reversing with that/those role(s).

In work with oppressed populations, sociodrama is most often the preferable choice of method, at least until enough work has been done with a particular group or community to build a sufficient depth of trust and emotional safety that can allow individuals to explore more personal aspects of their lives in a group setting. Even so, the basic elements of the double, role reversal, role presentation/role interview, and surplus reality action have always been included to introduce these methods to those trainees with sufficient experience for use in their work with various client populations.

a special form of sociodrama: The Living Newspaper

The Living Newspaper was first developed by Moreno in Vienna, c. 1920-22 during the early genesis of his explorations of the creative process. Assembling a group of young actors, he began to create spontaneous performances with them (Moreno, J.L., 1973; Sternberg & Garcia). He would ask the audience to select an article from a newspaper of that day. After a brief consultation, the actors would create a spontaneous enactment of the article, with Moreno as director. In the Bangladesh trainings, the form has been explored by dividing a group into subgroups of four or five. Each subgroup chooses a newspaper article from which it creates appropriate roles and makes brief preparations. Then, each subgroup presents its spontaneous enactment to the remainder of the group.

In 2008 I also began to experiment with a unique variation of the Living Newspaper specifically created to be used with rural villages stricken by natural disasters, as a means to help their collective healing. I call this variation the “Personal” Living Newspaper because rather than a printed newspaper story it uses a personal experience during a natural disaster as the content for spontaneous enactment. While it has important similarities with Playback Theater, it differs by transforming an individual experience into “newspaper” form.

C. sociometry

J.L. Moreno created the theory and practice of sociometry in order to study the formation, evolution and operations of groups. The primary means of study follows from group spontaneous action methods. However, paper-based analysis is also used where appropriate, in cases where the group does not have sufficient trust and self-awareness to reveal connections openly.

Sociometry is the foundation of psychodramatic and sociodramatic group work. By bringing to light the myriad networks of connections within a group or between groups, sociometry provides opportunities to act on this awareness, and/or to modify and change relationships. Through a variety of methods, sociometry helps to identify those persons who are magnets for positive or negative identification, those who are the centers of psychological influence, and those who are isolated. This knowledge provides invaluable information for assessing the strength, maturity and functioning of a group. Sociometry can help to predict the behavior of the group or of individuals within it, or with other groups. It can give opportunities for trying ways to

strengthen positive relationships, lessen friction and increase the capacity of the group to satisfy its members. (Blatner, 2000; JL Moreno, 1978; Z. Moreno, 1987.)

Sociometry examines relationships through empirical investigations of the phenomenon Dr. Moreno termed tele. Moreno defines tele as the invisible web of feelings that occur among people. This includes the webs of connection between individuals in any group or among groups, whatever their size and purpose. At the most basic level, tele can be positive, negative or neutral; in actuality its manifestations are more complex. Moreover, the phenomenon of tele is different from the fantasies or projections people have about themselves or each other.

Some of the common tools of sociometry are the spectrogram, sociogram and social atom. In the spectrogram, group members are asked to arrange themselves along an imaginary line, the spectrum, according their likes, opinions or feelings about a particular criterion. The ends of the line represent opposite poles. According to the situation and aims of the group, criteria can range from quite casual, e.g., "how I feel about chocolate ice cream" to deeply profound, e.g., "how satisfied I am with my life at present". After arranging themselves and noticing everyone's placement on the line, members are asked to share some reasons for their placement. (Blatner, 1996; Dayton; Sternberg & Garcia)

In a sociogram, group members are asked to indicate their choice(s) of one or more group members according to a given criterion. This can be done either in action, with the choices of each member visible and open, or on paper, with the results available only to the persons conducting the sociometric investigation. In action, choices are usually indicated by placing one's hand on the shoulder of the person chosen. The resulting geometric pattern of choices is the sociogram. Group members are then asked to share with the person chosen their reasons for choice (Blatner, 2000; Dayton; Hale).

In the social atom, which can be done on paper or in action, a person is asked to create a diagram of persons to whom s/he has important relationships. The person places him/herself at the center, or nucleus of the atom. The relative importance of these relationships are shown by their closeness to or distance from the center, by size, or other visual means. Relationships include those that are mutually positive, negative or mixed. The social atom can be used both as a tool for investigation, to promote self-awareness, or as a springboard for change. (Dayton; Hale; Leveton; Sternberg & Garcia)

More extensive discussions of the philosophy, tools and methods of sociometry are available in the standard literature (Blatner, 2000; Hale).

D. role theory

Because tele actually manifests through the roles which given persons are using to relate to one another, sociometry includes within its purview role theory.

Moreno's role theory of personality holds that the behavior and motives of human beings can be best understood by studying the collection of the various roles through which they interact with others and which give form to their inner realm of desires, fantasies, dreams and aspirations.

Moreno succinctly defined role as "the actual and tangible forms which the self takes." (Moreno, JL, 1977). Role has also been described as a "...functioning form of human behavior as it emerges in response to other people or objects in specific times and places. It is systemic in nature, taking into account individuals and their relationships" (Clayton).

The most easily recognizable are the social roles, e.g., the mother, the child, the hero, the failure, the leader, the follower. Each individual creates his/her unique

version of the cultural role, viz. a nurturing compassionate mother; a demanding perfectionist; an insecure anxious mother, to name but a few individual variations of the generic mother role.

The dynamic relationships between the individual and others are expressed through roles. Any given role implies a reciprocal role in order to satisfy certain internal emotional needs. For example, the strict perfectionist teacher needs a compliant student in order to actualize his role. Faced with a rebellious, an insouciant or an irresponsible student, someone in this particular teacher role will likely experience frustration, anger or self-doubt, and will attempt either to engage with other students who do show the reciprocal role, or to take on a different version of the teacher role that is a better fit with the student roles actually being encountered. In the absence of interaction with another person who takes on the complementary role, the given role exists only as inner potential, part of the cluster of psychodramatic roles that contain the unfulfilled aspirations or needs of the individual. .

Role theory also clarifies our understanding of the inner landscape. One can explore the psyche as a structure of roles which exist in a variety of relationships to one another, some supportive and compatible, others contradictory and conflicting. Thus, for example, an individual who possesses the compassionate nurturing mother role may also contain a rebellious adolescent, a harsh dictatorial parent and an aggressive dominating leader.

An especially fruitful method of describing interactions among persons is to identify the role demands they place upon one another. A role demand is created when one person takes on a particular role in order to interact with another in the complementary, or counter-role. The other may choose to accept the role demand, thus assuming the desired reciprocal role, to reject it by assuming a very different type of role, or to engage in a process of negotiation to arrive at a compromise. From this perspective, both interpersonal and intrapsychic conflicts can usefully be described as the subtle or overt interplay of role demands which are accepted, rejected, modified or otherwise negotiated at a level of interaction below the surface of verbal content.

Further discussions of both the conceptual and practical aspects of role theory are also available in the standard literature (Blatner, 2000; Moreno, Z.T.,1987; Clayton; Sternberg & Garcia).

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