

PSYCHODRAMA AND ITS USES - Compiled by Sister Brigid Hirschfeld

Psychodrama is a professional practice which uses action methods. It is based upon the theory, philosophy and methodology of Jacob L. Moreno, who was born in Rumania in 1892 and trained as a psychiatrist in Vienna. He was the first person to formulate and develop group psychotherapy and his theory and methods have formed the basis for many of the subsequent therapies that have evolved. Psychodrama was brought to the United States in 1925 by Dr. J. L. Moreno and grew rapidly as a world-wide creative therapy.

In Australia, interest has grown over the last ten years and our first directors of psychodrama were trained at the Moreno Institute in Beacon, New York, under Jacob and Zerka Moreno. They include Max Clayton, Lynette Clayton, Heather McLean Walker and Teena Lee-Hucker. Psychodrama is now used here in a variety of settings including hospitals, organizations in both the private and public sector, and educational institutions.

Definition

Psychodrama, according to Moreno, is defined as the "science which explores the 'truth' by dramatic methods". It involves the action portrayal by one person, of an individual or personal problem, with the assistance of a trained director, using past, present or future situations. If it is used in a group setting, members of the group participate by taking roles. Psychodrama provides a stage to explore life situations in action. It enables the person to enact events of emotional significance, to resolve conflicts and to release from inhibitions which limit the capacity for spontaneous and creative activity. The basic difference between this form of therapy and the primarily verbal therapies, is that psychodrama provides a direct vehicle through which the individual actually re-experiences the central issues of his or her life.

Basic to an understanding of psychodrama is the concept of sociometry. Sociometry is the conceptual framework for understanding group structure and resulting group interactions. Every group has underlying structures which influence the alternatives we acknowledge, the choices we make, and consequently, the energy we expend in response to each other and to our positions in life. Within all formal social collectives eg. family hospital or work setting, church etc., there exist psychological currents which informally create bonds between its members. Using psychodrama and sociometry, the group can be studied in terms of the interpersonal relationships between its members and also the interpersonal conflict and dysfunction that exist in its members.

Uses of Psychodrama

1. To diagnose a problem. eg. What is the particular behaviour that causes difficulties in this situation? What is the belief system behind that behaviour?
2. To teach new skills. Given that there is a problem behaviour, the person explores alternative ways of handling the situation. In some instances this may involve teaching basic social skills.
3. Exploratory. The person can explore events or situations that may happen in the future and that are causing anxiety, and experiment with different ways of dealing with them.
4. Unfinished business. A situation from the past may have been dealt with inadequately and remains unfinished for the person. Psychodrama enables one to re-experience the situation, handle it differently and finish with it. Situations involving unresolved grief are particularly suitable to be dealt with in this way.

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Problems such as conflict resolution, lack of assertiveness, hostile or angry parents or families, confused roles, coping with bereavement or loss, and breakdowns in communication, are amongst the many that can be effectively dealt with using psychodrama. A person needs to have some ego integrity for psychodrama to be effective. Its use with grossly psychotic patients is therefore limited. Psychodrama can be applied not only to therapy, but also to personal growth, professional development and education.

Psychodrama emphasizes the individual's responsibility for him/herself. It stresses optimism in unfulfilled potential for positive, constructive living, and affords a more dignified and helpful picture of human personality than either the mechanistic model of the behaviourist or the fatalistic evolutionary determinism of the Freudian. Reality can be tested by the careful reconstruction of a past event or a rehearsal of a future event. We can discover the spontaneous reactions and feelings of ourselves and of those with whom we interact - in contrast with the distorted projections which we commonly foist upon each other. The enormous range of roles we can potentially play in our relationships can be explored in a fail-safe situation which allows us to increase the variety and flexibility of behaviour we exhibit to others - in effect, to become more spontaneous and creative in our life styles.

J. L. MORENO, M. D.: HIS CREATIVE PATH - adapted from Carl E. Hollander (Colorado USA)

Jacob Levy Moreno was born in Bucharest, Rumania on May 22, 1892. He studied at the University of Vienna where he became a member of the faculty in philosophy. In 1917, he received his doctor of medicine degree. Moreno's life between 1908 and 1936 is marked by startling and revolutionary innovations in personality development, social theory, therapeutic methodologies, and a theory of humankind.

Between the ages of 16 and 19, Moreno would walk through the gardens of Vienna interacting with children. He would encourage them to act out in impromptu fashion those fairy tales, conflicts, and autobiographical vignettes that spontaneously evolved. Charmed by his gentle and spontaneous character, the children, their parents, and teachers urged Moreno to open a formal theatre for children. His dramatic efforts evolved to the first performance of the Komoedian Haus on April 1, 1921, in Vienna. The Komoedian Haus became the first official session of psychodrama.

While a medical student in 1913-14, Moreno met a young woman who unwittingly had ventured out of the Am Spittleberg, the red-light district for prostitutes, and was promptly arrested for wearing flashy clothes during the day time period; the inference being that she was soliciting customers before sundown. Upon her release from the police station, Moreno, accompanied by a newspaper publisher and a physician specializing in venereal diseases, began to visit the ghetto of houses of prostitution. Entering into dialogue with sub-groups of eight to ten women, two to three times weekly, Moreno employed the notions of Marx and LaSalle in an attempt to organize the women into a labour union hoping to raise the status of the entire class. However, the most significant development was fortuitous. During their informal conversations over "Jauze", the Viennese version of "tea time", the topics discussed changed to personal grievances, anecdotes of everyday incidents encountered by the women: accusation, venereal disease and pregnancies that threatened the child with social rejection. Through their informal discussion concrete steps were taken to relieve their stresses. Lawyers were acquired to represent them in court; doctors agreed to treat them and a hospital agreed to admit them. The most far reaching reward was an awareness that these women were able to help one another. Moreno related his efforts at community cohesion and group healing to those of Anton Mesmer. He extrapolated the initial tenets related to group behaviour marking the work with prostitutes as the official genesis of group psychotherapy.

While Moreno was superintendent of the children's section of Mittendorf State

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Hospital near Vienna, he was appointed by the Austro-Hungarian government to supervise the sanitation conditions of the ten-thousand Tyrolean refugees. Fleeing their homes from the attacking Italian army during World War I, the peasants were relocated in Mittendorf, caught in the dilemma of relocation, lost homes, forced communal living conditions among many shock waves of adjustment. Moreno availed himself of the opportunity to study and recommend alternative methods for social and psychological relief. It was in Mittendorf between 1915-18 that the idea of a sociometrically planned community emerged.

Shortly after the Komoedian Haus was opened in 1921, Moreno expanded on his role playing theory by conceiving the Stegreiftheater, a theatre undertaken to produce repertory group of spontaneous-creative actors, the Stegreiftheater became the locus for studying interpersonal time and space, roles, emotions, movement and degrees of spontaneity. He wrote, "It is chiefly from there and from my book on the Theatre of Spontaneity that the inspiration for the use of play techniques, spontaneous play therapy, group psychotherapy and role training derived, methods which many psychoanalysts and educators have gradually assimilated into their work".

Moreno developed his many interlocking theories from a religious orientation. His serious thoughts of God are pertinent to the understanding of his theory of sociometry. Moreno stated, "...behind all my actional and written communications and my insistence that all measures and tests of humanity should be constructed after the model of God involved in the creation of the universe". He added, "God is an exceptional case because in God all spontaneity has become creativity". Moreno believed that all people had the creativity of God within them and could realize their highest potentialities. Thus, each person had a cosmic or infinite capacity to unite with the universe of people, objects, and circumstances. To deify one's power, a linking bond or reticulation into the matrix of life is essential. In order to test one's capacity to establish a relationship one needs to reverse roles and become the other. People actualize their potentials when they allow themselves to be open to their inner "Godhead". Such a phenomenon paves the path to a cosmic empathy and love.

In conclusion: Moreno immigrated to the United States in 1925 where upon he accepted a position at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City; opened the Impromptu Group Theatre in Carnegie Hall for the public in 1929; coordinated the classical Hudson Training School sociometric research project with Helen Hall Jennings in 1932; collaborated with William Alanson White in 1937 and established a psychodrama theatre at St. Elizabeths Hospital, the largest federal mental hospital in the United States. In 1936, Moreno settled in Beacon, New York, where he started a theatre, a school, and a mental hospital.

J. L. Moreno, M. D. left a vast literary legacy to the world. In addition to his extensive books, articles, chapters, and monograph, he coined many terms and constructs that have become secular social science terminology: sociodrama, psychodrama, sociometry, role playing group psychotherapy, encounter ... role reversal, auxiliary ego, and double. Moreno died in May, 1974. He is survived by his wife, Zerka, their son Jonathan, and a daughter, Regina.

THE PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIODRAMA - by Lynette Clayton

This paper discusses the definitions of Sociodrama and Psychodrama in terms of their different goals and similar assumptions.

Both sociodrama and psychodrama take an interpersonal perspective. Psychodrama however focuses on the individual's personal perception of events, and views the interpersonal situation as it is perceived through the framework of constructs about the world which an individual has developed. The focus is upon the internal world and experiences of the person and the group members. Sociodrama focuses on the external

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world, on the groups, organisations and macro-structures such as cultures and political ideologies which shape the interpersonal experiences of people.

Both sociodrama and psychodrama have an underlying systems approach. A systems approach asserts that any whole - whether it be personality, organisation, a society or a physical environment - has an organisation which is based on homeostasis or equilibrium and has an existence independent of the sum of its parts. A system is always in process of dynamic movement and change.

Sociodrama and psychodrama are phenomenological, that is, they emphasize description rather than explanation. The focus of analysis is on the structure of the system and on the process which occurs in the system. The assumption is that while observation and the measurement of the process is taking place, the system has already changed. Measurement, therefore, can be likened to a still photograph and the ongoing movement or process within a system to a moving picture documentary.

Sociodrama and psychodrama elucidate the systems underlying the whole of society. Moreno (1951) comments upon this discovery:

The discovery that human society has an actual dynamic, central structure underlying and determining all its peripheral and formal groupings may one day be considered as the cornerstone of social science. This central structure is either found or is discernible in every form of human society ...: and exerts a determining influence upon every sphere in which the factor of human interrelations is an active agent - in economics, biology, social pathology, politics, government and similar spheres of social action (1).

Both sociodrama and psychodrama assume that man is an actor and is capable of spontaneity, that is, vitality, flexibility, originality, creativity and adequacy in response to any situation. The degree to which spontaneity is mobilised is dependent upon the past experience and wisdom of the person as it is stored in action memory (the cultural conserve) and upon the way a person activates thinking, feeling and action in a particular situation (the warming up process). Spontaneity is in balance with anxiety which is produced by mobilising old inappropriate responses which are inadequate in a situation. This may be the result of sensory or emotional deprivation, damaging experiences, distorted perceptions, or limited models and limited experience. Spontaneity affirms that a new response is possible in any situation.

Sociodrama and psychodrama are complimentary not competitive approaches to man and society. Psychodrama could be described as belonging to the field of individual and group psychotherapy. The field of sociodrama is the society. J. L. Moreno distinguishes between the genesis of society and the genesis of personality in the following passage:

Knowledge of the central structure of human interrelations is essential to any general planning and construction of human society. In fact, this was well-nigh impossible as long as the key structures remained unknown. Man believed that the genesis of society was outside his province - even more so than the genesis of personality.... The new philosophy of human interrelations, sociometry, gives for the determination of the central structure of society and the evocation of the spontaneity of the subject - agents, and these two factors together supply us with a basis upon which the planning of human society may be undertaken (2).

In summary, sociodrama and psychodrama take an interpersonal rather than an intrapsychic perspective. They both have an underlying systems approach to the person, groups and organisations. They share a phenomenological approach focusing on the process of what happens rather than an objective measurement. Both sociodrama and psychodrama assume that man is an actor and is capable of spontaneity which brings an element of newness to any situation. They are complimentary methods rather than competitive approaches.