

## ROLE THEORY AND SOCIODRAMA

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Since the behavior of individuals is usually "reciprocal action" with a person or persons occupying one or more statuses, *a role may be defined as the human interactions coordinated with the norms of two or more statuses.*<sup>1</sup> To understand role theory one must begin with *culture* and *status*. Some define *culture* as an organization of behavior expectancies and *status* as a unit of these expectancies "demanding" certain behavior of an individual functionary in a group.<sup>2</sup>

Our definition of a role is different from the one of Linton which considers the role "the sum total of culture patterns associated with a particular status."<sup>3</sup> But many have accepted this definition without realizing that Linton also said that one must recognize the "legitimate expectations of such persons with respect to the behavior toward them of persons in other statuses."<sup>4</sup> Mead, too, declared that, "The individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of other members of his social group."<sup>5</sup> Consequently, we believe that any consideration of role must recognize that it is *a system of interpersonal relations in a group*<sup>6</sup> rather than the mere enacting of the expectations of one status.

Another important consideration in connection with role theory is that the human *self* develops through participation in systems of interpersonal relations or roles. "The tangible aspects of what is known as 'ego' (or self) are the roles in which he operates."<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, one can define the *self* as the role-taking ability of a person. "A new role—when it is in its infancy—*leans* upon an older role until the time comes when it is able to free itself and operate alone. . . . In the course of time, this new role may become the mother pattern

for other new roles."<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the human personality may be conceived as an "action system" built into the human organism, "out of the interplay of self and role."<sup>9</sup>

If role theory is even moderately related to the actual facts of social life, the implications for the growth of the role and the human personality are great. It means that more is involved in human learning than the manipulation of symbols. Rather, it implies that *cognition* must be accompanied by *action* in a role, real, vicarious or simulated. Role "perception" and skill in role "enactment" develop hand in hand.<sup>10</sup>

Real action in a role may be called role-taking or "'being' in a role in life itself within its relatively coercive and imperative contexts."<sup>11</sup> Thus, a married man must actually assume the status of a husband and carry into action the expectancies associated with that role. Obviously, the role of a husband can only be activated in relation to the role of a wife. It may be coordinate with the two statuses, but not precisely the same, for the role-taking ability of each of the two selves may not be fully equal to the expectancies of the situation. More than this, the expectancies at best are not sufficiently definitive to provide all the "answers"; consequently, for satisfying role-taking some degree of *spontaneity* or *creativity* is necessary to meet situations which have not been anticipated in the culture or by the two selves. Without spontaneity, a kind of "dead" living takes place based entirely on the "culture conserve" in the two interrelated statuses.<sup>12</sup>

An excellent analysis of the effect of role-taking upon the attitudes and actions of an individual participant has been made by Turner.<sup>13</sup> Participating in role behavior may (1) cause one to adopt the norms of behavior of the other, or (2) cause one to adjust one's behavior to act in a way to conform to the expectancies of the other. Either way of determining behavior has a profound influence upon the self; and the totality of influences has a bearing upon the self and the action pattern of the total personality of each individual involved in the role-playing process. Turner believes that "the fundamental source of social values appears to be the standpoint of the other,"<sup>14</sup> (or of the generalized other) and the norms of a reference group with which one compares himself.

One may go further than role-taking in the development of the self in real situations and *practice* or *play* roles for the purpose of learning more than a "normal" life experience might give by role taking only. When one "plays" a role involving two or more "indivi-

dual" statuses in a particular group (psychodrama) one is learning "individual" adjustments; but when one "plays" a role involving "collective" representations of norms in two or more "reference groups" or cultures (sociodrama) one is learning understandings with respect to adjustments between or among the cultures of two or more groups. Both types of learning are of great importance; but the *second type* provides the opportunity for individuals to assume the role of representatives of other groups or cultures in practice and, consequently, to understand the attitudes of other groups that he may broaden his insights and/or deal with representatives of other groups and culture more intelligently. Sociodrama, then, is a means for learning cultural understandings *in depth*, including appropriate actions. In the sociodrama one can play roles for the purpose of exploring, experimenting and developing new concepts of role systems.<sup>15</sup>

Sociodrama, therefore, may be used as a means for exploring relationships between groups by means of role playing. The situations may be those involving relationships, especially issues between local groups or peoples like between capital and labor or Negro and White in a local community or between Arab and Jew or Western Peoples and Russian Peoples in the World Community or even historical situations like the strife in Rome during the period of Augustus. Thus, with the sociodrama one may "bring the cultural order to view by dramatic methods." One may "explore and treat at one stroke, the conflicts which have arisen between two cultural orders, and at the same time by the same action . . . change the attitude of the members of one culture versus the members of the other."<sup>16</sup>

Sociodramatic role-playing is not too difficult to organize when representatives of different groups between which an issue is involved are in an audience or a classroom; but when the cultural backgrounds of an issue are not in the previous experience of an audience or a class a great deal of preliminary study may be necessary before viewpoints can be properly represented.

It is difficult for young people studying "strange" roles to volunteer to reenact them before a large group; therefore, some form of "warming up" is necessary.<sup>17</sup> The recognition of the situation is a preliminary "warming-up" process; but a class may be divided into many small compatible groups, with the aid of sociometry when possible, to permit each group to re-create the problem in social relationships.<sup>18</sup> For example, each group in the class may reenact the relationships between representatives of various nations in an international dispute

Middle East over the Suez Canal and other issues. One person in a small group may take the position of Israel, another the position of Egypt, another the position of the United States and another the position of the United Nations. This procedure gives *anyone* in an audience or a class an opportunity to play a role, to "step up" to a role, to express feelings spontaneously, to reverse roles, etc. Theoretically, role-playing in small groups can have a marked educational effect upon the development of the self and of the interaction pattern of the individual or his personality.

Although the interaction in small groups as just described may be considered role-playing, the more formal role-playing and sociodrama is carried on *before* and *with* an audience or class. Volunteer role-players may be obtained from small groups. After a short conference with respect to the "locale" of the interaction and upon the exact nature of the issue to be discussed and/or acted out, the volunteer role-players may precipitate a spontaneous discussion or drama which, *usually* will involve the whole audience or class.

As the sociodrama unfolds—as the nature of a reality is progressively revealed, the emotions of the audience or class may be deeply aroused; consequently, more and more members may take part in the role playing until nearly every member in the room is involved. Persons who may not have volunteered to play roles at first may wish to take part and even suggest new ways of role-playing which may represent possible solutions to the problem being portrayed.

Through continued role playing, role analysis and replaying for solutions participants themselves may apply or even build ethical standards which apply to the situation. In this way a practical application of ethics may be realized by the participants.

Role theory can be made an educational instrument of great significance when applied in the form of sociodrama. It can *demand knowledge, develop insight into social life and produce wisdom*. This result may be obtained with respect to social relationships and roles related to local, national and international issues of the present time or of the past. Thus, the sociodrama may be considered an application of role theory to education in the social sciences and in history.

Persons may play roles of *representative* persons with respect to *world issues*. They may *re-create* the controversy by *playing* the roles actually taken by the real participants. For example, students may play the controversy between West Germans and East Germans with respect to the unification of Germany. Also, role-playing may be

"reversed" so that the participants may "see" the dilemma from two (or more) different positions or roles and, thus, understand the sentiments felt by the representative persons on both (or several) sides of an issue. In this manner, those who participate in role-playing exercises may learn to understand social reality, including the facts involved and the feelings and aspirations of different groups or peoples as well as possible solutions to social dilemmas.<sup>19</sup>

Thus conceived, the sociodrama can become an important aid in helping students understand sentiments and aspirations associated with great issues of modern times and of history. Some contemporary international dilemmas which could be recreated sociodramatically and studied are: the conflict between the Frenchmen and Arabs in Algeria, the issues between the British and the Cypriotes in Cyprus, the conflict between Nationalist China and Communist China, the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, the West-East conflict, etc. Today these and many other international issues have become great dilemmas of our times partly because of the ineptitudes of the representatives of these peoples in their international relations. These ineptitudes are legion today; they may even provoke the release of explosive power sufficient to destroy the pattern of Western Civilization, including a significant portion of the people who are now operating it. One cause of these profound ineptitudes is ignorance—ignorance of the culture and sentiments of other peoples. Another probable cause is the possession of distorted ideas with respect to other peoples. If ignorance and distorted ideas are causes of many of our miserable failures in international relations, then one approach to the reduction of current ineptitudes in human relations with respect to peoples and relationships among peoples is to introduce representatives of these peoples to experiences which promise to reduce ignorance and correct distortions.

The sociodrama, by stimulating actual intergroup relations, can be used as an instrument for experiencing the views and feelings of others, thus a basis for more intelligent thinking and acting is provided.

If contemporary world dilemmas can be replayed for analysis vital problems faced by persons in historical times may be brought to life too. Kaminsky,<sup>20</sup> for example, directed his students in the "bringing to life" of the French Revolution and the relationships among nobility, clergy, bourgeoisie, and peasants at the time of the meeting of the National Assembly on the fateful night of August 4, 1789:

This sociodrama required a careful analysis of such roles as the chairman of the committee to investigate disturbances, a representative of the clergy who deplored the loss of faith among the people, a noble who called for unity among his peers, and a spokesman for the common people (Third Estate) who demanded immediate reforms. The settings were the meeting hall, lobby, and courtyard of the National Assembly building. Student participation and interest was very good. Kaminsky reported that the sociodrama (adapted from a TV program, *You Are There*) contributed to an understanding of the conflicting interests of the different groups involved in the French Revolution as well as to the development of self-confidence and the ability to think in a difficult situation.

Some issues of history which could be studied by means of role-playing are: the conflict between Socrates and the Athenian Senate, the French Revolution, the battle between King John and his nobles, etc.

The efficacy of the sociodrama is predicated upon the validity of the observation that meaning in the mind of an individual is developed when one takes a role in "real life." The converse of this may also be true; i.e., ignorance remains in the mind of an individual to the degree that he does not take or experience roles. One cannot have all experiences, but one can simulate the taking of a role as it is called, play a role. Thus, one who would understand the current Jewish-Arab conflict in the Middle East, for example, can play the role of the Jew in the conflict and then "reverse" his role and play the role of the Arab. When one thus "practices reality," one learns to understand the "reality" better. And, when one understands "reality" better he may be able to make a better adjustment to it because, "one becomes an object to himself."<sup>21</sup> If the role-playing experience requires one to play roles typical of those played in a group different from his own one creates his concept of the "generalized other" or in other words one comes to true consciousness of the interests and needs of the other group.

But, without specific techniques for putting the sociodrama into operation the potentialities of it remain latent. One cannot go before a group and say, "Now we are going to have a sociodrama," and expect it to work. If in the group there are representatives of people now in conflict, volunteers may be immediately available who will stage an excellent sociodrama. However, many issues not immediately experienced by the members of a class which one is teaching may be

considered important to understand—either from the point of view of contemporary affairs or of history. To “sociodramatize” these issues preparation is essential, for many people are either completely ignorant of the problem or have incomplete or biased information with respect to it. A problem of the director or teacher, therefore, is to present the important dilemma to be considered in a manner which will arouse a genuine interest in the social problem to be studied. The following practical steps are suggested for the conduct of a successful sociodrama with a group who may have no primary or “natural” knowledge or interest in the problem.

### RECOGNITION OF A DILEMMA IN HUMAN RELATIONS

The easiest approach, as has been pointed out, is to ask the group to introduce its *own* problem with respect to a social dilemma. There is always more interest in a problem thus selected than in one selected by a director or teacher. But the range of problems which is readily recognized by a group of students or the information with respect to the issues involved is very limited. Since a function of the director is to educate youth or adults with respect to matters on which they are ignorant or misinformed, great care must be taken in introducing new issues. To accomplish this any one or any combinations of the following may help: field trips, films, phonograph records, lectures, readings, discussions, or other resource information. This preliminary study must be carried on *until the problem situation becomes significant to a large number of the members of the class and until the fundamental roles in the conflict are identified and understood and the feelings associated with the roles are recognized.*

*Identification of roles.* When a problem situation becomes significant in the minds of students they can identify the roles taken in the conflict. These are the roles, which may be played to re-create the conflict situation or other problem situation. In preparing to re-create the Arab-Jewish conflict in the Middle East, for example, Gurion's role may be played to represent the *Jewish* position, Nasser's role can represent the *Arab* point of view, Anthony Eden may represent the *British* viewpoint, Dulles, the *American* and Gromyko, the *Russian* angle. Of course, the students must do much more than mention the names of these men. The main points of the position of each may be outlined on the blackboard by the class and the teacher or director. It may take considerable study to make clear the fundamental

position of each of the groups in the conflict; but these positions must be clearly delineated before adequate role-playing can take place.

*Practice role playing in small groups.* It may be of value to divide a large class into a number of small groups each equal in size to the number of roles to be played. This procedure has several purposes. Informal practice in small groups gives *every one* in the class an opportunity to play a role. It provides a period of "warming up" or breaking down reserve and of increasing feelings of *spontaneity*. Good sociodrama *cannot* be developed by writing out and memorizing roles. The give and take of the discussion must spontaneously arise out of a rich background of understanding which is a product of real or vicarious experience acquired by reading and observation. The small group discussion can be informal preparation for a better quality of role playing which may later be made before the group, especially when the problem involves considerable learning *before* the sociodrama proper can be introduced.

*Selection of role players.* At this point students may be invited to volunteer to play the roles involved in the issue before the class. Students who do not volunteer should never be forced into the sociodrama; some who may not at first volunteer will be anxious to take part later.

*Role-playing.* Before role playing begins it may be desirable for the "players" to confer for a short time to agree upon the setting for the action and upon the definition of the issue to be discussed and/or acted out. Also, players must examine their own biases and try to free themselves from them so that they may represent freely the role they are to play.

The role-playing itself should go along nicely because of interest which has been generated over the period of preparation, including the practice in small groups. In sociodrama participants should remember, says Moreno, that individual participants are representing the position of *groups* rather than (as in psychodrama) the position of *persons*. True it is that interpersonal and intergroup relations cannot be completely separated; but a distinction should be made with respect to emphasis or orientation. Thus, if the sociodrama is to portray the reality of the great issues between the Arabs and the Jews in the Middle East, the personal uniqueness or problems of Gurion and of Nasser, as persons, are of negligible importance; but their views as representatives of the wishes and policies of two great groups of peoples are of great importance.



It may be noted at this point that the role-playing described here was *prepared for*. The reason for this is that youths in school have had limited experiences, making it possible for them to dramatize spontaneously only a very limited number of problems in intergroup relations outside of *local* intergroup problems. This article, however, deals with the sociodrama applied to the education of youth with respect to problems in international relations or historical issues both of which are remote from the experience of youth. Consequently, a background of knowledge must be acquired *before* roles can be understood or played.<sup>22</sup> This requirement, of course, is something of a departure from the important principle of *spontaneity* which has been fundamental to Moreno's success with the sociodrama. But he has emphasized that considerable spontaneity is possible even under the limitations imposed by this plan.<sup>23</sup>

*Analysis.* But a sociodrama exercise is not complete with the role-playing of a small group before the class. As the sociodrama unfolds, as the nature of the social reality is re-created by the role-playing the feelings of all in the room may be deeply aroused. Consequently, class members who may not have volunteered to represent positions at first may now feel urged to supply information, to suggest how the roles may be played better, and to indicate possible solutions to the dilemma which is being portrayed.<sup>24</sup>

The process of dramatization to this point can be of great interest to many in the class. New social insights are acquired with respect to intergroup conflict and a deep interest is aroused in a search for solutions.

*Replaying of roles.* The development of the sociodrama exercise so far may have shown to the group the need for an improved representation of positions. A new "cast" may re-create the situation in an "improved" manner.

The group may also suggest one or more possible solutions to the dilemma including ways of portraying these by means of the sociodrama.<sup>25</sup> For example the group may have portrayed the present impasse in Arab-Israeli relations by the following:

Gurion: "The Jewish homeland must be expanded now before you Arabs get too strong."

Nasser: "The Middle East is our Arab country. The Jew is a foreigner. You and your peoples must be stopped now before your population gets any larger."

Someone then may suggest that a conference of Arab and Jew with a representative of the people of the World, like Dag Hammerskjold. The probable views of Hammerskjold are then reviewed. Following this, a likely conference is enacted; and the problems involved in working out a "solution" are revealed.

*Democratic development of ethical standards.* Through the whole emerging sociodramatic process it is possible that many may understand that certain combinations of roles in international relations or world history produce serious dilemmas while other combinations may lessen them. The recognition of these differences may be called training in the *ethics* of democratic citizenship, including dependability, respect for the personalities of others and ability to cooperate ("axiodrama").

Informed and interested persons can re-create many of the great scenes and issues of our times and of history in the classroom by means of the sociodrama. This procedure can have great value not only for teaching the deeper meanings associated with these events but to place these great events before a "social microscope," where they can be analyzed for mistakes made and for successes achieved. In this way students may create their own version of the intergroup relations as they might have been and thus acquire *understanding* and *wisdom*. They might even achieve "solutions" to problems in human relations never before conceived. Consequently, role theory and its practical application in the form of the sociodrama may be expected to become of great significance in the future with respect to the education of peoples for living in the second half of the Twentieth Century.

### TRENDS

It should be noted that the fundamental ideas of role-playing and sociodrama are being adapted in many areas of our society including business. According to Gordon<sup>26</sup> adaptations of role-playing are being used to iron out difficulties with respect to production and to improve production standards, to give salesmen opportunities to practice improving customer relationships, to increase selling effectiveness, to iron out difficulties between factory representatives and field office representatives, to improve foreman-worker relationships and to improve the executives understanding of the problems of other workers in the business. The point is that the problems in human relationships

for these areas are simulated in business conferences. The role-playing makes the problem real and has been found to be a better instructional method than plain lectures.

(For this chapter the annotated footnotes represent a selected bibliography on the subject of role-playing and sociodrama.)

Leslie D. Zeleny (1898—), B.S., University of Minnesota (1922), M.A., Columbia University (1923), Ph.D., University of Minnesota (1931); post-doctorate study, The London School of Economics and Political Science. Five years of military service in World War I and II; Chairman, Division of the Social Studies and Professor of Sociology, Colorado State College (Greeley). Author of: *Practical Sociology* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1937); *An Introduction to Educational Sociology* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1934 with Ross L. Finney); *Problems of Our Times* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1935, 1936, 1937, 3 vols., co-author D. S. Brainard); contributor to such books as: "A Sociological Curriculum," Chapter 14, in Joseph S. Roucek, Ed., *Sociological Foundations of Education* (New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1942); "The Leadership Process," Chapter 17, in Joseph S. Roucek, Ed., *Social Control* (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1956); "Intergroup Understanding in Colleges," Chapter 29, in *One America*, edited by Francis J. Brown & Joseph S. Roucek (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1952) etc. Onetime Associate Editor & Contributing Editor, *Journal of Educational Sociology*; Contributing Editor and Issue Editor, *Sociometry*.

Jacob L. Moreno (Bucharest, 1892—); University of Vienna (1910-1912); medical school, Vienna (1912-17); M.D. (1917); came to the United States (1927), naturalized (1935). Superintendent, Mitterndorf State Hospital, Vienna (1918); officer of health, Voslau (Austria, 1919-25). Originated "Living Newspapers" and the idea of psychodrama (1923); inventor and patenter of "radio film" for electro-magnetic recording of sound on discs for radio transmission and reception (1924); licensed physician (New York State, 1927); engaged in private psychiatric work, New York City (since 1928); began psychodramatic work with children, Plymouth Institute, Brooklyn, and introduced "spontaneity test" at mental hygiene clinic, Mt. Sinai Hospital (New York City, 1928); did psychodramatic work, Grosvenor Neighborhood House and Hunter College (1929); made sociometric studies, Sing Sing Prison (1931-32); responsible for the first Sociometric Conference in the United States, Philadelphia, 1932); Founder and Physician in charge, Beacon Hills Sanatorium (now Moreno Sanatorium (1936—); founded "therapeutic Theater," first Theater for Psychodrama (1936); founded *Sociometry, a Journal of Interpersonal Relations* (1937); Lecturer, New School of Social Research (1937-38); Columbia Univer-

sity, Teachers College (1939-40); assisted in Foundation of Theater for Psychodrama, St. Elizabeth Hospital (Washington, D.C.); Founder Sociometric & Psychodramatic Institute (now Moreno Institute); Fellow A.M.A., American Psychological Association; American Sociometric Association (President, 1945). Among his numerous works, the latest: *Sociometry, Experimental Method and the Science of Society* (1951); *Who Shall Survive?* (rev. ed., 1953). *Sociometry and the Science of Man*, 1956.

## NOTES

1. J. L. Moreno and F. B. Moreno, "Role Tests and Role Diagrams of Children," in *Psychodrama* (New York: Beacon House, 1946), 161-177. In this article Moreno states that "roles are not isolated; they tend to form clusters;" see also: *Who Shall Survive?* (Beacon, N. Y.: Beacon House, 1953), 326.
2. Theodore R. Sarbin, "Role Theory," in *Handbook of Social Psychology* edited by Gardner Lindzey (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publ. Co.), states, 223-258, that "culture appears to be no more than actions of persons."
3. Ralph Linton, *The Cultural Background of Personality* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1945).
4. *Ibid.*
5. George H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, ed. by Charles W. Morris (University of Chicago Press, 1934).
6. J. L. Moreno, "Psychodrama and the Psychopathology of Interpersonal Relations," in *Psychodrama, op. cit.*, 177-216. Moreno states that "a role is an interpersonal experience and needs two or more individuals to be actualized."
7. Moreno, "Psychodramatic Treatment of Marriage Problems," *Sociometry*, III (1940), 2-23.
8. Moreno, "Psychodramatic Treatment of Psychoses," *Sociometry*, III (1940), 115-122.
9. T. R. Sarbin, "Role Theory," *op. cit.*
10. Moreno, "Role Tests," *op. cit.*
11. Moreno, *Who Shall Survive?*
12. *Ibid.*
13. R. H. Turner, "Role-Taking, Role Standpoint, and Reference Group Behavior," *American Journal of Sociology*, XLI (January, 1956), 316-328.
14. *Ibid.*
15. L. D. Zeleny, "The Sociodrama as an Aid in Teaching International Relations and World History," *International Journal of Sociometry*, I (September, 1956), 29-32.
16. Moreno, "The Concept of Sociodrama," *Sociometry*, III (November, 1943), 434-449.
17. For procedures in producing a sociodrama, see: Moreno, *op. cit.*, Helen Jennings, "Sociodrama as an Educative Process," in *Fostering Mental Health in Our Schools* (1950 Yearbook, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Washington, D. C.: NEA, 1950); Charles E. Hendry, Ronald Lippitt and

Alvin Zander, *Reality Practice as an Educational Method* (Beacon: Beacon House, 1947).

18. L. D. Zeleny, *How to Use Sociodrama* (Washington, D. C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1955); this article introduces the use of small groups into the sociodramatic procedure.

19. A source for much of the material in this section is: Leslie D. Zeleny's *How to Use Sociodrama* (published as a pamphlet by the National Council for the Social Studies) and the same author as "The Sociodrama as an Aid in Teaching International Relations and World History," *International Sociometry*, I (1956), 29-32.

20. Albert Kaminsky, "'You are There' in the Social Studies Classroom," *High Points*, XXXVI (May, 1954), 36:43-48.

21. Moreno, *Sociodrama—A Method for the Analysis of Social Conflicts* (Beacon, N. Y.: Beacon House, 1944), Psychodrama monographs, No. 1.

22. R. B. Haas, "Sociodrama in Education," *Sociometry*, II (December-March, 1948), 240-249.

23. C. C. Bowman, "Role Playing and the Development of Insight," *Social Forces*, XXVIII (December, 1949), 195-199.

24. Leopold von Wiese, "Role Playing as a Method of Academic Education." *Group Psychotherapy*, V (April-July-November, 1952), 73-77, shows how the sociodrama can be used to teach the meaning of social reality in college classrooms.

25. Zeleny, "Sociodrama as a Means of Studying Controversial Issues." *Southern California Social Science Review* (October 18, 1948), shows the use of sociodrama in teaching the meaning of international issues.

26. Mitchell Gordon, "Role-Playing," *The Wall Street Journal*, CXLIX (March 15, 1957), 1.