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SOCIODRAMA

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This article defines sociodrama as an experiential group-as-a-whole procedure for social exploration and inter-group conflict transformation.As such, sociodrama can be regarded as an action oriented and structured counterpart to group analysis with large groups. After a brief description of its history, practice and theory, three different applications of sociodrama are described which alternatively focus on actual traumatic events and social crises, on political change and social disintegration, and on social diversity which leads to inter-group conflict and prejudice. The various goals of sociodrama, towards more homeostasis, equality and tolerance in society, may prepare the ground for inter-group conflict resolution and peace promotion on a more global socio-political scale.

Key words: conflict resolution, group psychotherapy, large groups, peace promotion, sociodrama

Motivated either by national aspirations or by personal drives, people throughout history seem to be regularly and repeatedly lighting the torches of war as a collective consequence of their disputes. Whole societies create and re-create tragic scenarios of hatred and revenge. Inter-group discrimination, riotsr terrorism and war form a constant mix of the daily international news reports. This articles attempts to discuss the potential of sociodrama to explore such events.

'Hostile attitudes between groqps, sometimes leading to aggression, is one of the world's most serious problems. Psychological , research so far has succeeded in explaining it, but not in curing it' (Argyle, 1991: 23). Although some people feel that group psychotherapists should not meddle in global socio-political matters, others say that it is impossible to conduct any therapy without taking universal inter-group conflicts into consideration. From my experience in Israel, I agree with the latter view because when daily preoccupation centers around the stress of physical survival, other concerns naturally lose much of their urgency. In places where people are faced with intergroup clashes on a daily basis, and where there is an increased polarization between various subgroups of society, conflict management becomes a task, which is at least as urgent and important as that of helping survivors to cope with their traumatic experiences. Moreover, whether we like it or not, conflicts are brought into every group at some point when participants reveal their social identities and start to mirror and be mirrored by others. As interpersonal relations develop, people are naturally prone to re-enact some of the cultural stereotypes and hostilities of the society in which they live, which may give rise to scapegoating, fight-flight, or any of the other familiar manifestations of group conflict which reflect the society at large. As Powell (1989: 278) pointed out, 'the small group carries in its foundation matrix the destiny of all mankind, with polar opposites of love and hate, integration and destruction and life and death'. If we as group therapists could help to prevent, or to

resolve, some of the underlying conflicts causing tension, there might be less traumatization and, as a result, less need for crisis intervention.

Therapists who are blind to the external world and prefer to work within a social vacuum run the danger of helping patients to adjust to a destructive society. As an illustration of this danger, O'Connor (1989) tells the story of a young woman with numerous irrational fears who came to Frieda Fromm-Reichmann for help in Europe before the Second World War, shortly before the therapist left for the United States. During the course of the psychoanalysis the patient gradually overcame her fears and after three years the therapy was successfully concluded. A few weeks later however, the young woman, who was Jewish, was taken by the Gestapo and sent to a concentration camp.

Fortunately, group therapists today are in general deeply engaged in the socio-political realities of their countries and continually emphasize the influence of external factors on groups (e.g. Hearst, 1993; Hopper, 1996). Rather than focusing only on people in relation to themselves or in relation to a few others, group therapists often take a global view of inter-group and 'group-as-a-whole' phenomena, keeping in mind the relation of one set of people to other people and to the society at large. A highly potent but relatively unknown method for such 'group-as-a-whole' explorations of the society at large is 'sociodrama'.

Sociodrama: History and Definition

Sociodrama is an experiential group-as-a-whole procedure for social exploration and inter-group conflict transformation. It was developed during and after the Second World War by the founder of psychodrama and sociometry, J.L. Moreno, in order to improve the delicate fabric of coexistence between various groups of post-war society. In contrast to psychodrama, which focuses on individual dynamics, and sociometry, the method for studying interpersonal relations, sociodrama was developed as a deep action method for dealing with inter-group relations and collective ideologies (Moreno, 1943/1972). Moreno hoped that by re-enacting social and political conflicts, and by having representatives of different groups reverse roles with one another, people could gain a perspective that would bring about understanding and peace and a new social order (Marineau, 1989). Gradually, he formulated a grand vision of improving intercultural relations around the world by conducting public sociodrama sessions that could be recorded and transmitted through mass media to millions of people.

Moreno (1943/1972) based himself on the assumption that when two different cultural groups coexist in physical proximity and when their members are in a continuous process of interaction, they will invariably clash. Many such clashes would lead to some kind of 'sociopathology' as manifested, for example, in unemployment, addiction, crime, poverty or political chaos. In common with many early sociologists, Moreno conceived society as an organism that can be either sick or healthy, and envisioned a method of 'societry' in which social scientists (he called them 'sociatrists' for society as a paraphrase to 'psychiatrists' for psychiatry) would be responsible for the cure by such methods as socioanalysis, clinical sociology, group psychotherapy or sociodrama. This biological analogy of society is obsolete today and terms such as 'socio-pathology' (Lemert, 1951) have been largely replaced by, for example, social 'disintegration' which is not based on an organic model of society.

Apart from his first sociodrama experiment in Vienna in 1921, and the Living Newspaper performances in the United States some ten years later, Moreno used sociodrama at professional meetings with mass audiences to explore a number of major social events such as the Eichmann trial, the Kennedy assassination and the Harlem riots, to mention but a few (Z. Moreno in Sternberg and Garcia, 1989). Sociodrama was later applied to various inter-group conflicts, such as those present in racially mixed areas, in law enforcement and in education (Haas, 1948).

Sociodrama: Practice

In their book Sociodrama: Who's In Your Shoes? Sternberg and Garcia (1989), described sociodrama as a variety of role playing applications in education, business, therapy and theatre. As far as I understand it, these activities should be designed as theme-centered or group-centered psychodrama, not as sociodrama, because the expressed goal of sociodrama is to explore social events and community patterns that transcend particular individuals, as explained in their Chapter 14. In other words, by focusing on groups and societies, sociodrama is a form of 'socio-therapy' rather than a form of 'psychotherapy' which focuses on the personalities of individual members, including their roles. Unlike the psychodramatist, who is concerned with the responses of specific individuals to various situations, the sociodramatist will try to understand human social behavior in general and focus on the 'group-as-a-whole'. The 'group-as-a-whole' is a basic postulate in sociodrama according to Moreno (1943/1972: 354):

It is the group as a whole which has to be put upon the stage to work out its problem, because the group in sociodrama corresponds to the individual in psychodrama.

For Moreno, the group in sociodrama refers to a larger social unit than the small group and so, correspondingly, sociodrama can be conducted at the level of micro-sociology, exploring details of particular interactions as they manifest themselves in everyday life, and/or at the level of macro-sociology, focusing on the broader structure of large organizations, such as those comprising cities and states and entire countries. When describing the social system of groups at any of these levels, sociodramatists apply concepts of individual dynamics to the group as if the group could behave, feel and think like an individual. Thus they try to reveal the secrets of the collective, or 'co-unconscious' (Zuretti, 1994) group mind as reflected in the 'matrix' (Foulkes, 1964; Powell, 1989, 1994) of the group-as-a-whole (Schermer and Pines, 1994) in order to understand how it is a reflection of the society at large. As such, sociodrama can be regarded as an action-oriented and structured counterpart to group analysis (Hamer, 1990; Powell, 1986).

From a technical point of view, sociodrama is ideally conducted in a large hall with moveable chairs, in an open amphitheatre or a town square with suitable sound amplification equipment. People sit around an open empty space in the middle where the action takes place under the leadership of a sociodramatist who tries to keep the group actively involved. The group should be as heterogeneous as possible in order to represent the actual population at large. The size of groups varies from a minimum of about 20-40 participants to 40-80, or to large groups of a hundred or hundreds, or very large groups of around one thousand people at some international congresses. Naturally, the size of a sociodrama group has a significant effect on the group process and specific large-group dynamics should be taken into account when practising sociodrama.

As described in the relevant literature (Agazarian and Carter, 1993;
de Mare et aI., 1991; Klein, 1993; Kreeger, 1975; Milgram and Toch, 1969), large groups may for example be characterized by various projective processes, depersonalization and personality invasion, anonymization and generalization, envy and 'forced' democratization (Main, 1975). Most powerful is the extraordinarily high interpersonal energy level of the large group, as if the 'crowd' had a life of its own, which in itself creates an extraordinary environment for inter-group explorations. Naturally, handling large numbers of people who struggle with inter-group social conflicts is not an easy task. Not only is it difficult to keep the boundaries and hold eveything together, but sociodramatists are also faced with some inherent pitfalls that demand special attention to prevent psychological casualties. First, if hostilities are expressed, subgroups may become unrestrained herds that inflict harm on one another and/or on the sociodramatist. Second, charismatic and power-hungry leaders may use the large group for their own narcissistic needs rather than for empowering others and thus create an authoritarian mass marathon psychology organization (Cushman, 1989) that has a repressive influence on people. Third, intense uncontrolled emotions may be evoked without sufficient small-group network support available, leaving people lonely and vulnerable. Finally, sociodrama may appear too simplistic, too superficial, too sentimental and too optimistic about the possibility of peaceful coexistence (Sabelli, 1990) if practised in an unrealistic and naive manner. Therefore, apart from the necessary knowledge and skills, sociodramatists also need to have a lot of courage, stature and experience to do the job effectively.

Sociodrama: Theory

Though Moreno (1953) suggested some possible preconditions for a more peaceful coexistence in his book Who Shall Survive? The Foundations of Sociometry, Group Psychotherapy and Sociodrama, his theories cannot be regarded as a sufficient basis for sociodrama because they neither explain the development of social conflict in a consistent manner, nor do they formulate clear principles which may guide practitioners in their efforts to resolve conflicts, beyond the recommendation that people who do not choose one another in sociometric tests should be separated, and that people should 'love their neighbour' through role reversal (Moreno and Moreno, 1969: 17).

On the other hand, the literature on inter-group conflict in sociology, social psychology and anthropology is sufficiently rich to provide sociodrama with a strong theoretical foundation. For example, conflict is a key explanatory variable utilized by such classical social thinkers as Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Scheler, Georg Simmel and Max Weber, and later by social investigators such as Deutsch (1973), Festinger (1954), Frank (1967), Goffman (1963), Lewin (1948), Parsons (1967) and Sherif and Sherif (1969) to mention just a few. They describe various aspects of the social psychology of inter-group conflicts, including the six major ones summarized by Taylor and Moghaddam (1987):
(1) realistic conflict; (2) social identity; (3) equity; (4) relative deprivation; (5) elite; and (6) the five-stage model, each of which explains the source of the conflict differently. Moreover, the specialized literature on conflict resolution is full of models and strategies for how to turn conflict into co-operation and how to bring peace to relationships of all kinds if both opponents would only do what was suggested (Bisno, 1988; Cornelius and Faire, 1989; Crum, 1976; Donahue and Kolt, 1993; Filley, 1975; Fisher and Brown, 1988; Fisher and Dry, 1981; Mindell, 1995; Pruitt and Rubin,

1986; Rosenberg, 1983; Rothman, 1992; Slaikeu, 1996; Walters, 1981; Walton, 1969).

Some of these interdisciplinary professionals were involved in various attempts to create a new profession of applied social scientists who would advise national policy-makers on conflict resolution and war prevention. For example, in the early 1950s a group of professionals tried to develop a general theory of human conflict based on game theory (Axelrod, 1984), decision theory and statistical modeling. However, according to Harty and Modell (1991), these attempts were largely unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, some ten years later psychologist Carl Rogers (1965) made a similar call to mental health professionals, to use encounter group principles to help solve conflicts on a global scale, whether interpersonal, marital, inter-racial, inter-group or international. Rogers was followed during the 1960s peace movement by a group of humanistic psychologists who also believed that therapy groups could be employed as a holistic-political tool to make peace between the United States and the then-USSR and to promote a communion of brotherhood between all human beings. Along the same lines, Maslow (1977:16) suggested that:

any method is good that fosters communication, understanding, intimacy, trust, openness, hOl1esty, self-exposure, feedback, awareness, compassion, tolerance, acceptance, friendliness, love, and that reduces suspicion, paranoid expectations, fear, feelings of being different, enmity, defensiveness, envy, contempt, insult, condescension, polarization, splitting, alienation, and separation.

Brotherly love, however, is a bit too much to ask of people who are involved in a hostile dispute. Though Moreno, Rogers, Maslow and others may have been correct from a psychological point of view, inter-group conflicts are surely more complex and more resistant to change than they had assumed. Not only did they fail to recognize that some tensions are grounded in real and substantial disputes, they also did not separate out the emotional, intrapsychic, interpersonal and group-as-a-whole sources of conflicts which demand an integrative approach to conflict management (Kellermann, 1996) rather than a one-sided encounter approach. Most obvious was their refusal to acknowledge any primary hostile or evil human inclination as a source of conflict (Adams, 1989) and their almost passionate rejection of Freud's (1930) assertion that aggression may be instinctual rather than a response to frustration (Okey, 1992). As a result, what was often lacking in their approaches to conflict resolution was a realistic appraisal of the possible multi-determination of human aggression, including instinct, drive, genetic make-up, environmental provocation and social situation (Bandura, 1973) and the need therefore to deal with conflict in a variety of ways.

Contrary to the above humanistic psychologists, it seems to me that any sound approach to conflict management, including sociodrama, must take into account the possibility that Freud was correct in his critique of the 'love thy neighbour' principle because:

men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved... they are on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them... someone to cause him pain,

to torture and to kill him... Who, in the face of all his experience of life and history, will have the courage to dispute this assertion? (1930: 111-12)

Regarding inter-group conflicts, Freud goes on to say:

It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness. (1930: 114).

Though space does not permit a full discussion of Freud's theories on the primacy of human aggression, I do believe that it is important to take a firm position on this issue when working with sociodrama.

Moreover, from a sociological point of view, I believe that sociodrama should be firmly grounded in a theory of social conflict and/or of consensus. One the one hand, according to the functionalist theories of Parsons (1967) and Merton (1968), social balance (and love) is an ideal virtue. On the other hand, social discord (and hate) are natural parts of the conflict theories of Karl Marx. What's more, co-operation and conflict (love and hate) coexist in society according to Lensky (1966), so that some conflicts may be highly desirable, a spice to living that gives an incentive to achieve personal or group goals. Differences between people are thus appreciated because they add valuable resources to the group-as-awhole. In contrast, destructive conflicts are based on a competitive world-view in which only one person can win while the other must lose (Deutsch, 1973). In any case, my main point is that any attempt to suggest a viable conflict-resolution strategy, must take such basic views of people and society, and co-operation and competition into consideration.

Applications of Sociodrama

While in the past peace-making has been highly reductionistic, it is now suggested that we take a more integrative approach to conflict management (Kellermann, 1996). Three different applications of sociodrama can be employed in various phases of inter-group conflict explorations. They focus, alternatively or in succession, on (1) actual traumatic events and social crises, (2) political change and social disintegration, and (3) social diversity which leads to intergroup conflict and prejudice. These applications of sociodrama, with their various social focuses, social theories and social ideals are summarized in Table 1, and will be further discussed below.

TABLE 1

Applications of Sociodrama	Social focus	Social theory	Social Ideal
Crisis	Trauma	Adaptation	Homeostasis
Political	Disintegration	Conflict	Equality
Diversity	Pejudice	Conformity	Tolerance

Crisis Sociodrama

The first application of 'crisis' sociodrama deals with individual and group responses to actual catastrophic events of national significance. The word 'crisis' means turning point and conveys a state in which a decisive social change is pending, shaking the whole balance of society. Classic examples of such significant events include the

assassinations of President Kennedy in the United States, and of Prime Ministers Palme in Sweden and Rabin in Israel, all of which had a profound impact on the citizens of the respective countries. Major crimes, terrorist bombings, earthquakes, riots and wars are further examples of events that put whole nations into a general state of emergency that could be partly or fully explored through sociodrama.

But crisis sociodrama can also deal with situations that are less sudden and unpredictable; crises that continue to evoke stress over a longer period of time, such as economic crises that lead to unemployment, or complete social transformations as those happening in the former USSR. The joint working-through of collective traumatic events (Davidson, 1987), as in individual crisis intervention, may help the group-as-a-whole to cope better with psychological stresses and help them to readjust to a new state of social balance. Such explorations of significant issues within a large heterogeneous population has a profound way of maximizing the sense of commonality and belonging in people. In order to achieve this goal and heighten the sense of emotional involvement, crisis sociodrama sessions usually include some stageing and re-enactment of the traumatic event by the participants who may volunteer to play the various roles needed in the drama. The personal recapitulations together create multi-faceted pictures of community coping and reorganization. Sessions always end with extensive sharing by the participants on a deep emotional level and often lead to a sense of belonging and universality which help people to cope better with the threat, loss, misfortune or challenge which everyone has in common.

Crisis sociodrama is not recommended during or immediately after the catastrophe when people are still overwhelmed by anxiety and the social structure is chaotic. According to Bustos (1990), sociodrama needs a little distance from the 'real' drama, which is so much more encompassing. At a later stage, when people have gained more control, sociodrama may help to confront and work through feelings of denial, alienation and isolation.

Various forms of crisis sociodrama have been applied to many major international catastrophic events (Knepler, 1970), such as the anguish of people in Argentina during the military junta and later during the Falklands War (Bustos, 1990, 1994); Ken Sprague and Marcia Karp in England worked with people on the other side of this conflict. Some of the psycho-sociodrama work of Monica Zuretti in various parts of the world should also be mentioned, as well as the enactment by Ella-Mae Shearon of the German election of right-wing extremists in 1989 (Feldhendler, 1994) and the experience in Paraguay (Carvalho and Otero, 1994). Several examples of the application of sociodrama in English-speaking countries are described in the book by Sternberg and Garcia (1989), including the work by Anne Hale. Accounts of some sociodramas conducted in Eastern Europe during the great transition are described in the German journal Psychodrama (e.g. Lobeck, 1990; Zichy, 1990). Stein et al. (1995) describe a sociodrama conducted during the Gulf War. Finally, explorations of the Jewish-Arab conflict in Israel, induding a re-enactment of a terrorist bombing, were conducted at the International Psychodrama Conference in Jerusalem in 1996.

Political Sociodrama

While the application of crisis sociodrama is based on a model of society that strives for balance and consensus and views social conflict as something disturbing, political sociodrama is based on a model that conceives society as being in a continual state of

crisis and in which conflict is something normal and even desirable for all social change and development. Consequently, the prime subject of political sociodrama is social disintegration, stratification and inequality as manifestations of socio-economic conflicts.

Political sociodrama is not identical with political theatre, but both are based on similar principles. For example, as in Boal's (1979, 1992) 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (Feldhendler, 1994), sociodramatists who are identified with the socialist camp also fight for minority causes, for the weakest and most neglected in the social hierarchy who are subject to continual injustices and who have little or no political power of their own. Furthermore, according to the principles of Brecht (1963) and in order to push society towards more social justice and equality, political sociodrama does not stimulate personal identification and catharsis through suggestion, but encourages participants to distance themselves from emotional involvement and to think rationally and critically about how to change their situation.

Political sociodrama may be applied to various socio-economic issues within trade unions, citizens' rights groups, neighborhood committees, political parties, educational institutions, feminist groups or other social activist groups.

For example, the social class analysis conducted by Monica Westberg and co-workers in Sweden explored the tensions between the working class, the bourgeoisie and the upper class. Explorations usually focus on central political value conflicts such as the ideals of right and wrong, justice and injustice, fair and foul play, respect and contempt, equality and inequality, altruism and egoism, authoritarianism and democracy, socialist and capitalist political systems.

From a more global perspective, sociodrama may also address such general issues as 'alienation' and 'passivity' as they are manifested in the social structures described by Etzioni (1968). The experience of sharing community problems in a sociodrama not only makes people more aware of and involved in the social problems of their immediate neighborhoods but may also give necessary input to community organization through interest groups that try to influence decision-makers on resource allocation and community planning.

Being based more or less on Marxist social conflict theory, political sociodrama generally has a clear ideology and purpose and is usually employed for social protest and agitation (Buer, 1991; Petzold and Mathias, 1982: 260). It includes an enactment of a social situation at hand and encourages people to express their political opinions and ideologies. Thus participants can be divided into groups of tough-minded versus tender-minded, conservative versus radical, fascist versus liberal and/or communist versus democratic (Bales, 1970; Eysenck, 1954), and be asked to motivate their choice of position. Clearly, however, much work remains to be done in documenting how this work has been done in practice.

Diversity Sociodrama

The third application, 'diversity' sociodrama, deals with conflicts based on stereotypes, prejudice, racism, intolerance, stigmatization and/or negative bias against people because of their diversity.

Classical examples of such inter-group conflicts include those prevalent between blacks and whites, immigrants and natives, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, men and women, young and old, and between the political left and right. As explained in the literature on social conflict, inter-group tensions seem to arise between all kinds of people who are different from one another, and in all heterogeneous populations there will be tensions based on, for example, differences in age, sex, marriage status, wealth, profession, race, nationality, country of origin, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, culture, religion, political affiliation and many other variables, including physical attributes, such as height, weight, disability and general outer appearance.

The purpose of diversity sociodrama is to resolve the following problem posed by Maslow (1977: 15):

How do we transcend the differences that currently compartmentalize humankind into mutually exclusive, isolated groups who have nothing to do with each other? How do we make contacts across walls separating classes, religions, sexes, races, nationalities, tribes, professional groups, and IQ groups?

Maslow (1977: 20) goes on to say:

it is difficult for two people to live together, let alone 200 million. Because we are different from each other and have not learned yet to accept these differences, constructing a society in a way to retain our autonomy, free choice, and permission to grow to full humanness will be difficult, and making the best possible compromise under these circumstances will never be a perfectly satisfactory compromise.

By focusing specifically on people in general rather than on each person in particular, sociodrama attempts to recreate and explore some universal processes of person perception, including stereotypical labeling and trait attribution.

This may lead to the conclusion that generalizations have little or no basis in external reality and thus facilitate a personal change of attitudes. If, however, diversities are real, participants in sociodrama may become more tolerant of those differences. Such tolerance comes from the realization that not everyone who looks and sounds different and thinks differently from us is bad or dangerous; that other people have their own rights and needs and that we have to learn to respect them as they are.

Conclusion

The social goals of sociodrama may be rightly considered ambitious from a global perspective. Obviously, permanent conflict abolition cannot be the final goal of sociodrama because tensions will continuously recur as long as people are together. Furthermore, to achieve social homeostasis as a result of 'crisis' sociodrama, social equality as a result of 'political' sociodrama and/or social tolerance as a result of 'diversity' sociodrama, is utopian, to say the least.

Despite well-conducted and powerful sociodrama sessions, social traumatization, disintegration and prejudic~ will surely continue to have a detrimental influence on society. Finally, other strategies of peace-promotion, such as direct negotiations between the disputants, preventive diplomacy, third party mediation, arbitration and various peaceful settlements of disputes (Boutros-Ghali, 1992), are surely more applicable to international conflict resolution than sociodrama.

Consequently, rather than formulating the goal of sociodrama in such exaggerated terms as 'human survival' (Moreno, 1953) or world peace, sociodrama may be more realistically appreciated as one of many activities that may help prepare for conflict resolution (Kaufman, 1996; Rothman, 1992). As such, it may have a unique potential for bringing large groups of different people together and opening up new channels of communication between them.

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