

TOWARDS A PSYCHODRAMATIC INTAKE: TWO TECHNIQUES OF SELF-INTRODUCTION

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The psychodramatic approach to the initial assessment of problematic areas in the psychological and behavioral functioning of the protagonist may be clustered into two major categories: sociometric procedures and action procedures. The first category includes both the use of the sociogram (Moreno 1953) and the role diagram (Moreno 1972, Hale 1975), which are essentially charts reflecting interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics of the protagonist. The second category, the action procedures, are by far more popular in current psychodramatic interventions. They include 'on-the-spot,' often intuitive evaluations of the performance of the protagonist as evidenced from his psychodramatic enactment of various life situations. The basic technique employed to allow for such evaluation has been the technique of 'self-presentation,' originally described by Moreno. The description of this technique reads as follows:

The simplest psychodramatic technique is to let the patient start with himself—i.e., to live through . . . situations which are part of his daily life, and especially to live through crucial conflicts in which he is involved. He must also enact and represent as correctly and thoroughly as possible every person near him, involved with his problem, his father, his mother, his wife, or any other person in his "social atom". . . . The presentation can relate to situations past, present, or future. The patient is asked not merely to portray situations which he has lived, but to duplicate them completely. He is also asked to portray these situations with as much detail as possible, in collaboration with a partner if necessary. If he is, in these situations, a lone character, he may psychodramatize them alone. (Moreno 1972, pp. 184-185)

While the 'self-presentation' remained the basic technique underlying every psychodramatic treatment, some writers—including Moreno himself—devised additional, more specific techniques which could serve as both warming-up techniques and techniques of evaluation. Among these one finds the 'Empty Chair', the 'Spontaneity Test' and the 'Spontaneity Test in Standard Life Situations' (Moreno 1972), the 'Magic Shop' (Moreno, 1964, p. X; Weiner & Sacks 1969), and the 'Exit Test' (Moreno 1965), to mention only a few.

As far as initial assessment is concerned, however, there seems to be a lack of specific psychodramatic techniques which provide the protagonist with an opportunity to present himself in a manner which may reveal his perception of himself, his fears, his assets and liabilities, his social skills, his approach to problem solving, and the characteristic modes of his communication with his surroundings. The 'self-presentation' technique can of course provide such information, but its major disadvantage is that it requires a considerable amount of time, and many unintentionally lead to a temporarily biased evaluation.

The present paper describes two relatively short techniques which can be used at the beginning of a psychodramatic treatment. These techniques provide every potential protagonist, in fact every participant in a psychodrama group, an opportunity to introduce himself through brief and standardized role-playing episodes. Furthermore, they enable the director to arrive at some initial psychological assessment, a sort of a psychodramatic intake, of every participant. We called these psychodramatic exercises the 'Photo Album' technique and the 'Outside-In' technique.

THE 'PHOTO ALBUM'

People carry memories of themselves, memories which encompass many facets of their past experiences. Memories are stored in the mind, but some are documented by means of actual photographs. The 'Photo Album' technique utilizes such existing photographs as stimuli to evoke some of the memories of 'how we were.' The technique is based on psychodramatizing meetings between the present and the past, the persons we are today and the people we were then, years ago. It is a form of a psychodramatic self-introduction.

DESCRIPTION

The group is seated in a full circle. An empty chair is placed in the middle of that circle. The director, standing next to the empty chair, introduces the technique of the 'Photo Album' as follows: "I would like to suggest that you introduce yourselves in a very interesting and simple psychodramatic way. All of us have photographs of ourselves, photos from our past. Photos from when we were babies, children, teenagers, and adults. Let us review some of these photos again. Let us introduce ourselves through some of these photos in a psychodramatic way. To do this, I am asking you to concentrate on this empty chair and as you do this try, in your own mind, to place on it a photograph of yourself, any photo of yourself that comes to mind first.

Try to visualize it in detail as clearly and vividly as you can. You may think of two photos of yourself, perhaps one you like and one you do not like."

A few moments later the director ascertains that every participant has complied with his request, and then he proceeds to explain: "I will, now, ask each one of you to place himself on this empty chair, as he is in the photo you have just thought of, and let's have a psychodramatic meeting with him. Who would like to start?"

PROCEDURE

There are numerous ways how to encourage the participants to start. The simplest way is, of course, to ask for a first volunteer. Another way is to move the empty chair and to place it, silently, in front of one of the participants, the one who appears to be ready to begin. Sometimes an indication by a gesture of the hand is also needed, a gesture conveying "Please, start." Alternatively, the director may pick up the empty chair and walk with it in front of the group, and as he walks around he may say: "Please, anyone who would like to start stop me, and I'll put the empty chair in front of you."

Whichever method of encouragement is adopted, the psychodramatic meeting proper begins with the emergence of the first volunteer. The director asks the chosen member—the protagonist—to describe the photo he had in mind, that is, to provide a *detailed* description of the image in the photo. The meeting is, therefore, between the protagonist who is sitting among the entire group (Present-self) and his image (Past-self) who is represented in the empty chair. The 'Present-self' starts with statements or questions addressed to the 'Past-self.' Then, the director will role-reverse the situation. Now, the protagonist sits in the empty chair as his 'Past-self' and talks back to the 'Present-self' who is now represented in an empty chair. In order to keep the verbal interaction active, a few more role-reversal instructions might be required. It is important, however, that the director will interview the protagonist in the role of the 'Past-self.' Such an interview ought to be brief and should not dominate the meeting. Some of the most revealing questions, in our experience, are: "Did he (she)—pointing at the empty chair representing the 'Present-self'—grow up to meet your expectations? Did you think of yourself becoming what he (she) is? In what ways are you ('Past-self') different from him (her) ('Present-self')?" Naturally, there might be many other questions and clarifications to put to the protagonist in the role of the 'Past-self' which might be dictated from the nature of the particular meeting.

A typical episode should last approximately five minutes to allow sufficient time for every member of the group to have a chance to introduce himself through this technique. If, however, the director requested each member

to think of two photographs, the meeting with the second one will follow immediately. Once every participant in the group has had the opportunity to meet psychodramatically with his 'Past-self,' a short discussion may ensue. Such a discussion will be a sharing type of interaction where the participants may share and compare experiences and impressions in an emphatic and supportive atmosphere.

INDICATIONS AND CONTRA-INDICATIONS

The 'Photo Album' technique is, in fact, a solo performance. It does not require the services of an auxiliary-ego nor does it demand a prior acquaintance with the psychodramatic process. The situations where this technique is mostly indicated may be divided into two categories: the need of the group and the need of the director. As far as the need of the group is concerned, the 'Photo Album' technique may be useful when (a) The participants in the psychodramatic session need to be warmed-up in order to enhance their sense of cohesiveness and their mutual trust; and (b) Members of the group are still strangers to each other and need introduction. This situation typically occurs in the very beginning of the formation of the group. From the point of view of the needs of the director the technique might be indicated when (a) He lacks sufficient psychological understanding of the participants and is in the process of formulation the initial assessment; or (b) He is searching for additional material regarding a particular protagonist in the attempt to have a clue for future psychodramas.

In some instances it is advisable not to begin a new group with the 'Photo Album' technique. Some people feel quite threatened by it. It is perhaps safer to start with other warming-up techniques, those which demand a lesser degree of self-exposure before introducing this technique. Although the 'Photo Album' technique allows the director to interview the protagonist, mainly in the role of the 'Past-self,' it is important that most of the self-introduction will be executed through the role playing itself. The director must find the appropriate balance between his verbal interviewing and the flow of the psychodramatic interaction.

VARIATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

The 'Photo Album' technique as described in the foregoing was designed specifically as a psychodramatic form of self-introduction and for intake purposes. It is for this reason that the protagonist is requested to reproduce, visually, a photograph of *himself* (*herself*). It is conceivable, however, that the technique may be employed for purposes other than those of self-introduction or intake assessment. Under such circumstances, a few modifications

or variations of the technique might be needed. These variations may involve psychodramatic meetings with other kinds of photographs. For example, the director may wish to confront the protagonist with (1) a *family photo*, that is, a photograph of his parents and other siblings; (2) a *photo of friends* or other significant persons in the social network and the vocational milieu of the protagonist; (3) a *photo of deceased person* with whom the protagonist has an unresolved conflict; (4) a *photo of a scene*: a childhood place, a house, a room or even a *photo of an object*, and (5) an '*unavailable photo*'. The last situation may pertain to either a photograph which was never taken in the past or one which the protagonist would wish to have in the future.

The decision to apply these modifications and specifically which kind of photographs ought to be introduced has to be made by the director according to the psychotherapeutic goals he hopes to achieve.

THE 'OUTSIDE-IN'

People reveal themselves in many different ways depending on the kinds of situations they are involved in and the impressions they wish to impart on their surroundings. The fact that personality characteristics reveal themselves in a selective manner is partly a conscious phenomenon and may be determined by factors such as the level of intimacy required in the interpersonal interactions, the definitions of the roles performed at a given moment, role expectations, and self-image. In general, the less psychologically guarded the person, the more he will reveal about himself, provided an appropriate atmosphere for such self-revelation is established. The 'Outside-In' technique was designated as a psychodramatic device enabling the participants in a group to introduce themselves, step by step, according to the many aspects of their personality. Starting with a description of the more public, observable personality characteristics as reflected in casual or formal social roles, the technique leads the participants to reveal other, more intimate, levels of their personalities. The technique was called the 'Outside-In' because it allows the protagonist to introduce himself starting with the outward behavior and gradually proceeding to that which is very personal and private. It should be noted that a somewhat similar idea was proposed by Robbins (1973), who developed the Matrioshka Doll warm-up technique.

DESCRIPTION

The group is seated in a semi-circle in front of a row of five empty chairs. The chairs are arranged in a straight line, as in a bus, and parallel to the group.

The director, standing next to the empty chairs, introduces the 'Outside-In' technique as follows: "I would like to suggest that you introduce yourselves to the group in the following psychodramatic way: "We have, here, a line of empty chairs. This line represents a 'whole person,' where each empty chair stands for one aspect or one level of the personality. For example, the chair farthest left may represent the kind of a person you appear in casual social situations or in your vocational role. Moving to the right, the next chair represents the kind of a person you seem to appear to your intimate friends. The third chair represents yet another, more personal, level of yourself, and so on. Each subsequent chair represents a more personal level of yourself. The last chair, the farthest right, stands for your innermost, private self. I would like each of you to come forward, one at a time, and introduce yourselves sitting on these chairs starting from the left chair and continuing to the others. You may determine the pace of your progress from one chair to the next one and may stop at any point." Before calling upon the first person to come forth, the director may devote a few moments to further clarifications, if required.

PROCEDURE

The procedure begins once a group member has come forward and sat in the first empty chair, the one on the far left. The director, standing near the last empty chair in the row, asks the protagonist "Who are you? How do you appear to other people? What are the things that characterize you in this role?" The protagonist is encouraged to respond in detail, to expound and elaborate on his answers. Then, the director suggests that the protagonist move to the next, second chair. Again, the same questions are repeated with the following additions: "In what ways are you different from the one who sat in the first chair? Are the two of you getting along all right? Is there anything you want to tell the part of you which was represented in the previous chair?" If the reply to the last question is positive, the protagonist may confront the first empty chair and say whatever he wishes. Then, the director may role-reverse the protagonist who returns to the first, or previous, chair and is given an opportunity to answer and reply. Depending on the content of the verbal interaction, the director may decide whether to continue with a few more role-reversals. The same procedure is repeated as the protagonist moves to each subsequent chair.

Most protagonists do *not* fill all the empty chairs during the first meeting. They reserve the right to protect themselves from a total disclosure. The director should respect their wish and permit them to stop at any point in the procedure. Sometimes, a protagonist may wish to alter the physical arrangement of the chairs and put them in a circle rather than in a straight

line, or to place two chairs together, one adjacent to the other side by side. Again, such wishes ought to be honored.

Once the first protagonist has completed the self-introduction the director thanks him for coming forward and calls for the next person. The procedure is repeated until every member of the group has thus been introduced to the group. At this point, the director may allow a short discussion in which people may share and compare feelings and experiences.

The length of the time allocated for each self-introduction may vary from one person to another. With a regular size therapy group (eight to ten participants) each person should be given approximately five to seven minutes. In a smaller group, or in special cases, this time recommendation can be altered.

INDICATIONS AND CONTRA-INDICATIONS

The 'Outside-In' technique is a psychodramatic exercise which requires the participation of only one protagonist and one director. The assistance of an auxiliary-ego is usually not needed. The circumstances under which this technique is indicated are essentially similar to those described in the 'Indications and Contra-Indications' section of the 'Photo Album' technique. Briefly, the 'Outside-In' is useful for warming-up purposes, for enhancing group cohesion and developing mutual trust, and as a means of initial self-introduction. It is also indicated for intake purposes and for searching further clues in order to proceed with the treatment. In addition, the 'Outside-In' technique may be used for assessing therapeutic progress especially when the focus of the treatment is on helping the protagonist to become open and spontaneous. In order to utilize this technique as an indicator for therapeutic progress a 'before and after' design is called for. Thus, the 'Outside-In' is administered at the onset of the treatment with the director recording the degree of openness revealed by the protagonist. This can be inferred from (a) the content of the verbal description, and (b) the number of chairs, or steps, he was willing, ready, and able to go through. The same technique is repeated towards the end of the treatment, and the performance at this stage is compared with that recorded in the beginning. The differences between the two performances may serve as an indicator of therapeutic progress.

The 'Outside-In' technique might be contra-indicated with a group comprised of very withdrawn and reticent members. Since self-introduction, especially as required by the 'Outside-In' technique, might be perceived as undue psychological pressure for self-revelation and a premature intrusion into the private world of the participants, careful judgment ought to be exercised before the technique is presented to such a group.

DISCUSSION

The two techniques described in the present paper, the 'Photo Album' and the 'Outside-In,' have many characteristics in common. The most obvious common denominator is the fact that both techniques are role-playing exercises of self-introduction, and that they constitute, together with other techniques, a 'psychodramatic intake,' or a form of psychodramatic interview. At the same time the two techniques are not identical. Each addresses itself to a different aspect of self-introduction. The 'Photo Album' allows for a self-description in a more historical, developmental perspective. There, the person is introduced by means of comparing himself at different stages of his life. The 'Outside-In,' on the other hand, requires presentation of the self according to the various facets of behavior. The focus of the attention, here, is on the present self, but as a multidimensional entity. Still, both techniques are based on similar principles and utilize common psychological concepts. These will now be discussed from the psychological, psychotherapeutic, and psychodramatic aspect.

Psychologically, one of the most potentially difficult issues in every task requiring the introduction of the self is the need to overcome the prevailing cultural code which calls for a restraint in talking about oneself. Self-evaluation and self-praise are modes of expression which are barely condoned in our society. People find it quite difficult to indulge in self-appraisal. Both the 'Photo Album' and the 'Outside-In' create legitimate circumstances for such self-evaluation. In a way, they are perceived by the protagonists as exercises in role-playing rather than forms of self-introduction. In a similar fashion, the two techniques seem to minimize the potential interference of yet another psychological phenomenon—namely, that of the influence of 'social desirability.' 'Social desirability' refers to the tendency of people to present themselves in a manner congruent with the demands and expectations of the social codes prevailing in their contemporary culture. It tends to prompt a positive description of oneself and to conceal the disclosure of behavioral conflicts, liabilities, and incongruities. The way the two techniques have been structured counteracts such a tendency. Thus, the 'Photo Album' implies that the way we are today may differ from the way we were in the past, and differences or similarities between the past and the present are facts which cannot be ignored. The 'Outside-In' is designed to present the self as a multidimensional and complex entity where differences and incongruities between its various components are only to be expected. Finally, both techniques elicit descriptions of the self as they are available on the level of awareness. Other personal traits and characteristics rooted in the subconscious level often reveal themselves from the overall performance of the protagonist, from the differences between his verbal account

and his behavior, and from the incongruities between the various aspects, or stages of development, of the self.

Psychotherapeutically, it is important that techniques of self-introduction will contain measures which reduce fears and anxieties associated with exposing one's very private self. Self-disclosure increases the feeling of vulnerability which, in turn, heightens the feeling of insecurity. By resorting to a strategy of gradual exposure to the tasks required, such feelings and anxieties seem to subside.

Psychodramatically, both techniques offer an interesting and easy way of introducing the psychodramatic language into the new therapy group. Both techniques use role-reversal, acting out of various roles, and personalization of psychological concepts, which are part and parcel of any complete psychodramatic enactment. They also offer an unusual way of concretizing self-introduction, and thus may increase the curiosity and motivation of the participants to continue treatment.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that although the 'Photo Album' and the technique of the 'Outside-In' have been presented as group exercises, they are also ideal for individual treatment. Since neither technique requires the assistance of an auxiliary-ego, they can be administered in the presence of two people only, the protagonist and his director-therapist.

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