DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 043 055 CG 005 830

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TITLE The Present Status of Psychodramatic Research.
INSTITUTION American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C.; State Univ. of New York, Genesco.
PUB DATE Sep 70
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Convention in Miami Beach, Florida, September 3-8, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.65
DESCRIPTORS Drama, Dramatic Play, *Psychotherapy, Research, Research Criteria, *Research Opportunities, Research Problems, Research Projects, *Role Playing, *Sociodrama, *Therapy

ABSTRACT

Two major trends in psychodramatic research during the last 10 years are delineated: (1) evaluating its effectiveness as a form of therapy; and (2) varying the communications process via role playing to produce attitude change. Examples of both are given. The author concludes that findings to date may well dissatisfy the practicing psychodramatist and suggests that possibly the wrong research questions have been asked. The focus must be on more limited aspects of the psychodramatic process, if valid and productive scientific research is to take place. Several possible studies are suggested which are pertinent to psychodrama and which could be carried out with validity in respect to scientific criteria. Special emphasis is placed on a basic issue which the author views as having been almost totally ignored, viz., whether the spontaneity state actually exists. This is a question of examining the process as distinguished from the ends which can be achieved. The paper concludes by urging a renaissance of relevant psychodramatic research. (TL)

The Present Status of Psychodramatic Research

By John Mann

There are two major trends that can be observed in psychodramatic research during the last decade. The first consists of attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of psychodrama as a form of therapy, i.e. to determine whether discernible effects can be detected which can be attributed to psychodramatic technique rather than a variety of other causes, such as the faith of the subjects in psychodrama or the personality of the therapist.

Present evidence suggests that my own conclusions concerning the evaluation of group therapy, of which psychodrama was taken as a part, still hold (Mann 1966)
Specifically 45% of these studies suggest positive effects due to psychodrama. (See for example Leskin 1965, Slawson 1965)
This figure was found to be typical of most change procedures and does not suggest the relative superiority or inferiority of psychodrama to other approaches. The quality of such evaluations is highly variable; generally the best are performed as doctoral dissertations.

The second trend grows out of social psychological studies of attitude change produced through variations in communications procedures. Hovland acted as the seminal influence in stimulating and disseminating this research focus. Several of his students have utilized role playing as a primary means of varying the communications process in such studies. This work has been characterized by a relatively high degree of scientific sophistication and control and has been relatively productive within the limited sphere of its focus because it lends itself quite easily to replication. This is not to say that different investigators have necessarily obtained the same conclusions, but the reasons for varying

findings are more easily detected because of the precision of the studies.

For example approximately 15 years ago, Janis and King (1954) and King and Janis (1956) found that students change their attitudes in the direction of a position which they are asked present to others in an improvised quasi role playing situation. Role playing in these studies consisted of giving a talk or writing an essay supporting a certain preassigned viewpoint. This is more in the nature of a debate than role playing in the ordinary sense of the term, but the results are encouraging even if they may not be entirely relevant to psychodrama itself. This sort of experimentation has led to interesting theoretical discussions and a series of experiments designed to clarify the effects of a) various types of rewards for role playing performance; b) variation in the acceptability of the sponsorship of the study; c) decision to perform a role vs. actually performing it; d) improvising the role performance vs. giving arguments developed by others. The outcome of these studies are partially contradictory in terms of the theoretical contributions they are designed to make (Janis 1968) but the work itself is actively being continued and is generally productive.

A more striking study of the impact of role playing on attitudes and behavior was conducted by Janis and Mann (1965) and later generally confirmed by Mann (1967). In the earlier study a group of heavy smokers participated in a series of standardized scenes in which they were diagnosed as suffering from lung cancer for which an early death was the prognosis. A control group listened to recordings of the sessions without directly participating in them. The results were quite remarkable. Two weeks after the relatively brief role playing session the smoking

attitudes and behaviors of the experimental group was found to be significantly changed in comparison to the controls. Far more remarkable is the fact that 16 months later a follow up study (Mann and Janis 1968) indicated that the changes in smoking patterns had persisted.

In reviewing these kinds of conclusions the practicing psychodramatist may well be left with a feeling of dissatisfaction. On the one hand direct evaluation studies do not ever seem to prove anything except that psychodrama is partially effective. In contrast the contributions from social psychology seems at least partially irrelevant. The version of psychodrama that is adopted in studies of attitude change is so limited, that the conclusions, while comforting do not seem to relate to psychodramatic therapy. He can only conclude, that there is something missing in studies on psychodrama, a gap waiting patiently to be filled, if the effort of research is to result in cumulative findings of practical significance. It is to the nature of this gap that the remainder of this paper is dedicated.

Essential Aspects of the Psychodramatic Process

If the answers that are produced by research are inadequate it is most probably because the wrong questions were asked in the first place. Psychodrama is perhaps the most complex instrument for the production of behavior change that is currently employed. To attempt to evaluate this totality of uncontrolled and unspecified variables is a fool hearty endeavor. This situation must be simplified by focusing on more limited aspects of the psychodramatic process in order to obtain issues which lend themselves more naturally to the process of scientific investigation. As far back as 1952 Rosenberg illustrated how such an approach might be

pursued. (Rosenberg 1952) Her analysis of psychodrama suggested that one of the principles on which it was based was that the amount of understanding and change produced was directly related to the degree of involvement one had in the process. She set up a number of observer positions which varied in their degree of involvement with the psychodramatic action. Her results supported the conclusion that behavioral and emotional involvement led to increased understanding and greater attitudinal and behavioral change. In part Janis's studies of role playing also arrived at a similar conclusion. These findings not only help to justify the use of such a complex multi level instrument as psychodrama, which maximizes involvement of participants, but also has important implications for the basic strategy of scientific investigation, which makes the contradictory assumption that detachment is necessary for understanding. Regardless of the final resolution of this issue, the example shows how one can study psychodrama at a level of general scientific interest, while still remaining relevant to the needs and concerns of psychodramatists.

A number of such studies can be suggested which are pertinent to psychodrama and which have implications for those applied and basic fields of knowledge to which any change procedure must relate.

For example, to what extent can empathic ability be cultivated? Psychodramatic work in the training of auxiliary egoes and doubles is based on the assumption that such cultivation is possible. Most practitioners would claim that they have observed and benefited from the results of such training. Nevertheless the issue remains largely unresolved.

A relevant study would not be hard to design. Videotaped observations of subjects at different stages in a training process could be

shown to expert judges. If improvement occurred, judges should reliably be able to detect it. Suitable scientific controls could be introduced into such a situation with relative ease. If it were shown that such training actually improved empathic ability, its importance as a general educational experience in addition to its psychodramatic relevance would be clear.

A related issue and one of equal or greater importance concerns the use of auxiliary ego training as a means of improving the social competence of the egoes; that is, can auxiliary egoes be trained to spontaneously perform any given role that might be required with increasing proficiency. Using a similar approach of selecting behavioral samples from different points in the training process one could test this basic assumption. Since social competence is one of the major goals of most of our socializing institutions, family, school, government, the findings of such an investigation would have important implications far beyond those of immediate interest to psychodramatists.

Another important issue in psychodramatic work is the importance of the audience. How much difference does it make to the protagonist, the director or the egoes, if an audience is present. Does the audience constitute nothing more than the anonymous symbol of society or does it act in such a manner as to intensify the psychodramatic experience and multiply its effectiveness. There are several ways in which to approach this problem. First one can utilize pahntom audiences which exist only in the minds of the performers. For example the participants can meet in a television studio. The control group is told that the cameras are dead and that they are unobserved. The experimental group is told that the cameras are alive and under remote control. If other conditions are

standardized the influence of the audience factor can be evaluated.

An alternate approach is to systematically vary relevant audience variables such as size, quality and amount of participation while letting other factors remain constant.

The inverse question of the effect of live psychodrama or audience members is also important. This issue can be studied by comparing the relative effects of varying the level of reality of the psychodramatic experience. The experimental conditions might include a) reading a transcript of a session, b) watching a videotape of a session, c) being psychically present at the session. The impact of actual attendance should be discernible if it exists by a comparison of the relative effects of these conditions.

A further basic question involves the use of a dramatic form as the basic approach to behavior change. It is assumed that physical acting out is a vital aspect of psychodramatic technique. For some time this orientation was viewed as highly suspect by more orthodox psychotherapists, but the tide has clearly turned with the advent of the Human Potentialities Movement. Nevertheless the use of psychological drama as the basic vehicle of expression has hardly been studied. A number of relevant questions can be raised in relation to this issue. What is the relative effect of seeing someone else portray one's role versus doing it oneself? Does enacting painful or threatening situations help to reduce their hold on the individual? Does the enactment of situations which were left incomplete when they occurred provide the individual with new sources of energy which were tied to the previously unresolved events? Does the opportunity to phantasize spontaneously before others increase the protagonists ability to function in realistic situations?

There are many such questions all sharing some common relationship to the dramatic format on which the psychodrama is based. Almost none of them have been scientifically investigated. But beyond all these elements of the psychodramatic process lies a more basic issue which has been almost totally ignored by practitioners and researchers alike, with the striking exception of the creator of psychodrama, Dr. J. L. Moreno. The issue is whether the spontaneity state actually exists. The importance of this question may not be immediately obvious. We are all so oriented toward ends that we underrate the means and processes by which these ends are achieved.

Psychodrama was created from a positive existential orientation in terms of which God was viewed as an active creative force, not a dignitary, who had once visited the earth and long since turned his attention elsewhere. (Moreno 1941) The essence of this divinity was spontaneous action. The essential purpose of psychodrama was to help to purge humans of their accumulated difficulties so that they might experience such a state of innocent wonder and partake with the cosmos in the creative process.

From a psychological viewpoint an analysis of the experience of persons who have been through intensive psychodramas suggests a number of recurrent internal patterns that collectively might be described as the "spontaneity state." Such persons either completely forget about existence of the audience or cease to be concerned about their reactions. In fact they cease to be afraid of anything. Their temporal sense alters. They come to view time as an "eternal now" in which past present and future are all enfolded in a dream like experience from which they begin

to sense the possibility of awakening. A further experience is that the usual gap between thought and expression ceases to exist. Expression becomes an integrated whole.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the spontaneity state from the spectator's viewpoint is the free flowing creativity that is unleashed. In varying degrees the person in such a state acts as though inspired. He draws on resources which neither he nor his friends may have thought he had at his disposal.

Most psychodramatic practitioners have observed these kinds of alterations but their significance has not been appreciated, partly because these effects are not lasting.

In order to determine more scientifically whether the spontaneity state exists it is necessary to study persons in such a state and compare it with their normal patterns of behavior.

If it exists, and most members of this audience would probably agree that it does, then what is its significance? An answer to this question would go far beyond the topic of this paper. Nevertheless several suggestions can be made. First this state bears a resemblance to various religious descriptions of enlightenment, though without the attendant religious symbolism. The lack of fear, alteration of the time sense, enhanced awareness, expressiveness and the sense of imminent unity recur as common themes of mystical experience. From this viewpoint psychodrama can be seen as a means of altering consciousness to a more integrated and creative level of experience.

Further, while psychodrama has had a varying history since its creation and evolution in the early years of this century, its continuous

growth, as distinguished from its simple application depends on the development of the source of its vitality. There is little doubt in my own mind that this source is in the spontaneity state. Such a state must be studied not only to identify its characteristics more clearly, but also to identify ways in which it can be produced more efficiently in and in a more enduring manner.

Whatever differences may exist in priorities and commitments among interested professionals, all those who are seriously interested in the orderly growth of psychodrama as a method of treatment and a means of enhancing the human experience must join in hoping that the opening decade will bring a renaissance of relevant research in the area, devoted to important questions of concern not only to psychodramatists but also to their confreres in related professions.

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