

Sociometry, Sociodrama and Psychodrama with Third Generation Holocaust Survivors (3GH)

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English Abstract

This article illustrates the author's use of sociometry, sociodrama and a psychodrama over two sessions with a group who refer to themselves as 3GH (3rd Generation Holocaust survivors), and who are new to the psychodrama method. It describes the use of sociometric activities, the group members' journey of exploration as a member of the first, second and third generation of Holocaust survivors, and briefly describes some psychodramatic work with two people. The main purpose of this group was for the members to explore more deeply what it means to have a (post) Holocaust identity.

Introduction

This is a journey of a group of young people who wish to understand themselves and their history in a new way. Through a group process of talking, multi-media therapy (art, music and drama), sociodrama and psychodrama they opened up new vistas, entering into the unknown. They used various tools including video, digital camera and journaling to record this journey, with the idea of later using the collected material for a play. This article describes the sociodrama and psychodrama sessions, the other material being outside the scope of this article.

The Group

There were ten people in the group aged from 20 – 34 years, who met once a week for six three-hour sessions. Two co-convenors, who were present at all the sessions, conducted sessions one and six only. In addition there were two more invited leaders. I was one of these leaders and led the second and fifth sessions, the other person leading the third and fourth sessions. We had all met previously. Our principle aim was to seek to understand what it meant to be one of the third generation of Holocaust survivors from World War Two.

Session 2 – Part 1: Sociometric Warm-up

As this session started at 7.30 pm, each person came into the room and I introduced myself or was introduced. The atmosphere was friendly. They had all met the previous week and I noticed that they greeted each other warmly and light heartedly. All were dressed in colourful clothes apart from one, in stylish vibrant black. I felt as if I was in a field of flowers and was immediately struck by the freshness and distinctiveness of each person.

After we had all settled into our chairs in a semi-circle, I continued with a friendly warm-up by saying that I was glad to be there. I then explained that psychodrama was simply about relationships - our relationships with each other, the world and ourselves. I defined psychodrama by saying that it meant a thing done or a happening. I then explained that psyche was soul or self and drama was something that happens in our lives and that something is always happening, be it the simple everyday task of breathing, going to the post box or getting up in the morning. One person said, "Our lives are psychodrama". "Yes". Then I explained that when psychodrama is used in a group context we normally get off our chairs and enact or do something rather than talk about it. "So, how about we all get up and try out our 'psychodrama wings'?" (This is a term I heard Zerka

Moreno once use and I find it useful to use with new groups). While inviting everyone to get up, I asked them to stand in one of several spots – first born together, second born together and so on. As they did this they took in where everybody else was, noting each other from this perspective (criteria). Each group then had a conversation about what it was like to be a first-born, second born or third born and so on. Next, I asked them to form groups on the basis of how many children there were in their family (from one to five as it happened). Finally I asked them, to re-form on the basis of their star signs. For example, Aquarius, Pisces and Aries.

Many of this group were not known to each other before the group's initial meeting but everyone knew one of the co-leaders, who was the group's originator. I noticed interest and conversation increase as everyone became more fully involved through the three sociometric warm up activities. I then asked everyone to sit down in the group again and to share something about their experience so far. For example, were they surprised by anything, did they discover anything, did they notice what was similar or what was different? As each person spoke, there was an air of thoughtfulness in the room as they looked and listened to each other. The whole warm up took about half an hour. We then had a tea break of fifteen minutes during which I noticed everyone talking companionably with one another.

Session 2 – Part 2: A Sociodrama

In the next part of the session, as the group had bonded and felt safe, I was able to work with the group on a subject close to their hearts, the generations of Holocaust survivors. I conducted a sociodrama, not any one person's personal drama but a drama of groups. I asked the participants to form themselves into three groups; first, second or third-generation. One person was passionate that she was not sure that she could go into the first-generation group. I assured her along with everyone else that they must not do anything that they didn't want to. Then she said that maybe she should go there and see what it was like to be a member of the first generation because she had such a reaction, and this she did, immediately finding that she liked being there. This group formed a warm circle, holding hands and embracing. The room instantly became calm and peaceful. Four people then formed the third generation group, two standing separately side-by-side and two sitting on the floor. Another four formed the second-generation group, two women sitting together in a semi-circle at right angles to the third-generation group and a dyad of men, standing arm in arm, behind and left of the women, and directly opposite the 1st generation.

The Formation of the Groups

Forming the groups took a while. I asked group members to move around until they were sure of where they wanted to be. Several of them tried this process and then everyone talked about the choosing and how surprised they were that they knew when they had chosen the right place or where it hadn't felt right. There was a lot of interest in the second-generation group, with its division of women inside the circle and men outside the circle. The men in the second-generation group reacted strongly to the first generation because they had turned inward and felt rejected by them. One of the first-generation stood strongly above the rest as if he were looking after them. He was the only one who could see outside this firm and united group. The third-generation group had positioned themselves to one side and 'out of the line of fire' between the second and first generations.

It is important to say that each person was able to take as much time as they wanted to talk about how they felt and to express their thoughts. Forming the groups was a very powerful and potent experience for everyone and the dialogue flowed. At times I interviewed for role to enable them to share more of what they were experiencing in their roles but I did very little because everyone was so warmed up. Each stayed in role as first, second or third generation as they spoke deeply encountering one another.

Discussion

All of the first-generation spoke about an immediate and intense bonding when they first took up their roles. They also felt very peaceful through this experience and this surprised some of them. They talked about a safe warm haven, being with like-minded people and experiencing the world outside as another planet. All of them told the other group members that they didn't want to burden anyone. What they had was theirs alone and no one could possibly understand, nor would they want them to. In response the second-generation group were angry and challenging of the first-generation. They told them that they also carried a burden, that their pain was dismissed, minimised or not recognised at all (for example, in adolescence, the pain of rejection by a boy or girl, of not being chosen in the school sports team or the different food that they ate at lunchtime). They wanted to be the same as everyone else and described difficult school experiences. It was essentially the same theme – their pain (2G) could never match the pain of their forebears (1G). The third-generation group were quiet while these interactions were going on, some intently listening, others saying that they didn't like being in the middle

of this conflict. Many people later said that were relieved to be able to express their feelings and thoughts freely without reprisal. There were tears and anger, resentment, surprise, love and great simple wisdom. No one spoke over the top of anyone. There was great dignity, honesty and integrity.

Some of the themes that emerged in the first part of the sociodrama were:

- Anger about the lack of validation of their (2G) feelings.
- Loss of presence of first-generation in second-generation's lives – first-generation were either buried in the past or closed off emotionally.
- Pain and shame arising from lack of acknowledgement.
- Fear of loss of love if they expressed their true feelings to those who already had experienced much pain and loss.
- Guilt **arising** from expressing what they really felt and thought.
- Shame over different cultural **mores** – wanting to be the same as others.
- Being seen as disloyal if someone didn't agree with a group (third-generation).

Role Reversal

After approximately 20 minutes, I asked them to role reverse with members of another group. Some did this easily, others were not so sure, so we took time to walk around and test out the new positions. Some people were surprised that they felt so good in the first-generation group and identified this as a feeling of being with comrades. Others felt good in the second-generation group because they could express their feelings freely, while others liked and preferred being in the third-generation group. As one member of this group said, "I like you Grandfather, however I don't want to be taken over by you, your experiences are yours and I understand that, but this is a different world now and I have my thoughts and feelings about life and people. I want to have discussions about anything and everything." There was a respectful silence in the room at this point. I then asked them to make a final role reversal, which ensured everyone had the opportunity to be in each of the three groups, even for a few minutes.

Discussion

Everyone had been in their initial roles for some time before I asked them to reverse roles giving them an opportunity to express themselves fully, which they found very confirming. Role reversal is a very effective technique for 'being in the shoes of the other', but if a person needs to really explore their viewpoint or feeling, role reversal can actually hinder this process. eg. "I can't (won't) tell you what I feel because I know you'll be hurt." I later made several role reversals between respective participants as the dialogue progressed.

At the end of the sociodrama all participants were deeply satisfied by the authenticity of their experience. One man said how grateful he felt at being able to explore some of his feelings, thoughts and experiences in the specific roles he took up. He said that he had the opportunity of fully expressing his anger about second-generation members not being heard and he appreciated the fact that I kept him in role for a long time, giving him this opportunity. He said that in his role he felt free to express himself without guilt, which he found very liberating.

The Sharing Phase

By the end of the night, new perspectives had been revealed. One person said that he understood his father for the first time and a number others said how pleased they were to be able to express feelings without guilt as a member of one of the groups. People were amazed by the reality of the process being able to say what they wanted to say without hurting anyone. They also felt pleased and surprised when some of the first-generation listened and opened up their circle, another moving away from the group for a few minutes to listen to members of the second-generation. I shared too about several of my experiences, firstly about coming to the group and being totally welcomed by the security guard. When I had told him that I was here for the third-generation Holocaust survivor's meeting, he immediately opened the door wide and matter-of-factly said, "Come in, you're for us!" I also described my experience of being in Israel and deciding to go despite the bombings in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in 1996. And I shared with them my pleasure of being in a room filled with people so full of life and the honour that I had in going on this journey with them.

Discussion

The idea of the sharing phase in psychodrama is for people to give back the love that is expressed by protagonists as they reveal themselves through saying what they identify with, feel moved by or experience.

The sharing is for the protagonist or groups in a sociodrama to know that they are not alone, that others have similar experiences. The sharing phase is neither about making interpretations - since the interpretation is in the act of the drama – advice-giving nor making judgements.

Session 5: A Psychodrama Vignette and a Drama

In this session I was greeted warmly, “Good to see you again!” and, “I’ve been looking forward to seeing you!” I felt the trusted friend. Within ten minutes we were able to construct a vignette - a one-scene psychodrama - on someone’s experience that day of being fully seen by a non-Jewish person. The scene was set at the coffee table in an office. There was the protagonist and a young woman. The scene was enacted. As he made a cup of coffee for himself, the young woman, who had overheard him talking about the third-generation Holocaust group came up to him and looked him closely in the eyes saying, “I am sorry you’ve had such pain in your life”. I observed that he had slightly moved his body toward her. I asked him to follow his feeling and he took hold of her hand with his two hands and returned her gaze. He then turned and said to me, “That’s it.” I asked him to choose someone to take up his role and to stand out of the drama and watch. He was very moved. He commented that it was simply amazing to have a non-Jewish person enter his world, just like that. The sharing which followed the vignette was very tender, many people identifying with this theme. The protagonist looked very peaceful at the conclusion.

Immediately afterwards another man said that he wanted to look at his Jewish identity. We created a drama of three scenes in succession. From a surplus reality that consisted of him placing aspects of himself (enacted by other members of the group as his auxiliaries) around the room within the semi-circle, he walked in a park briefly with two rabbis, before finally sitting around a table with members of his family. The outcome was that he stood in front of his father and told him what he had never been able to before, that he loved him. He was then also able to say other things too. As I doubled him in this role, he was able to stay with his feelings of love for his father, ‘the man at the head of the table’. There were two role reversals, and with coaching from me to keep breathing, he said what he wanted to say again. Then he moved to sit on his father’s knee and because we had two male auxiliaries being father, he changed his mind from sitting on one pair of knees to sitting balanced on both with his arms around their shoulders. He lifted his feet off the ground and swinging his legs up, his face shining, exclaimed “Wow!” I encouraged him to let the sound be as big as he wanted it to be and to breathe as he did so. He took a breath and whooped it out with much delight. He asked the whole table to echo his delight and a most joyous sound filled the room. The sharing that followed was extremely generous. One person said, “You know I don’t feel as if I have to bring anything back to myself, I loved watching you and being part of your journey, finding what you did and expressing yourself. I feel peaceful and proud and joyful.” Another said, “My parents are coming to visit next week; I know what I am going to do. That’s it.”

Discussion

In this drama, the protagonist was able to express his feelings for the first time and to tell his father that he loved him. He was full of feeling in this new role and therefore it was very important for him to be able to fully express himself and to have such a cathartic experience. Other members were moved by this drama and one said that he was touched by the protagonist’s courage. He, in turn was proud of himself, and said that he had never considered being able to tell his father how he felt. Some of the members saw him as a model, while others found in him a mirror for their hearts.

In conclusion, what to say, only to make a toast, “To Love!”

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