

Sociodrama, act hunger and the sociometric connection
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Sociometry question for training to be trainers

Your training group has been engaged in practicing sociodrama methods. A variety of hot topics have surfaced which have great impact on their "citizen of the world". The energy level of the group exceeds the ability of many of the trainees to direct the action. Their fellow trainees appear not to be able to follow instructions, listen, or leave their high energy for role play. In response, you begin a teaching session on act hunger, and spontaneity. Explain in your answer the connection between sociometry and these two topics.

An answer suggested by Ann E. Hale, M.A., TEP March 30, 2006

Current events, both the local and global variety, can impact us and disturb us in many ways. Watching or hearing the news of events seemingly out of our control can call on the "citizen of the world", a cluster of roles in us which prompt us to seek ways to connect to the situation. We have energy for our intention, for action follow through, to connect with like-minded others. The strength of that energy can lead us to some sort of action campaign. Other times we let the energy subside through inaction or suppression. The sudden possibility to explore one of these issues in a sociodrama activates the act hunger to engage the topic, to have one's say, to be fully involved and contributing. Act hunger is an energetic state focused intently on the striving for an act, to have relief from the tension and undirected energy now that a focus for that energy has been identified. The drive to act and engage fully is so strong that the "observing ego" which monitors behavior falls away (or slacks off). During the dramatic action a person can lose the boundary between the separate reality of the sociodrama and the ongoing everyday reality of the training setting, its existing norms, behaviors, and interpersonal connections.

In the situation described in the question, students are practicing the sociodrama director role. In newly developed roles there is anxiety present. The spontaneity level is lower as the person works to learn the method in situ. The novice director is attempting to balance their (1) anxiety, (2) their desire to do well (the task) and (3) the pace and meaningfulness of the action. His/her fellow trainees are so wound up and acting up, out and in that the director's feeling of adequacy caves in. No one is listening to directions. Several scenes are going on at once. The action appears reckless and unsafe. And, they seem to be having great fun, which leaves the director feeling even more distant and excluded. The director falls back on an authoritarian role repertoire and gets a loud instrument and blasts on it

until the group stops the action.

Processing this event, the trainer talks about action denied and the build up of tension from not having sufficient access to: (1) roles of engagement in life; and (2) sufficient access to specific social groups where one may join with others and engage issues from a position of strength. The trainer presents the act hunger as the burst of energy which comes from taking the cap off a container. In this instance the container is a set of conserved roles and behaviors which need to be explored and broadened to include access to roles of the activist. In describing act hunger* the trainer makes the point that the "observing ego" is not available in those charged moments to safely and properly attend to the existing sociometry of the group, even the relationship each has with the director of the action. The trainer reviews Moreno's Canon of Creativity (Who Shall Survive, p. 46) and explains the energy the trainees were experiencing was generated by leaving the conserved role repertoire behind and building momentum for role playing and role creating as activists. There was also tremendous energy generated between group members who sparked the action offerings of one another. Both of these experiences were indications that their warm-up for the new roles of activist was supported by their spontaneity. A possible conclusion for the sociodrama was discussed by the students who chose the practical matter of identifying potential groups to join. In sociometric terms this is "expanding the cultural atom". (Who Shall Survive, p.70.) Additional resources: Sternberg, Patricia and Garcia, Antonina Sociodrama: Who's in your shoes? NY, Praeger, 1989. (which also includes a discussion of act hunger in "The Sociometry of Social Chaos" by Ann E. Hale, pages 174-175)

*When Moreno wrote about act hunger (Psychodrama, Vol 1, NY, Beacon House, 1946, p.60-69) he referred to act hunger syndrome as it is manifested in infants. The state is described by him as total involvement in the act to the point that there is no capacity to register the act, no observing ego. The infant relates to his/her world as though all persons and objects are auxiliaries.

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