Chapter 1

Introduction to Social Work, Sociometry, and Psychodrama

Abstract This introductory chapter provides context for the content covered in the rest of the book. Background on the evolution of the book and increased social work attention to psychodrama is offered while also defining the basic concepts of sociometry, psychodrama, and social work with groups. The importance of considering differences between cultures, populations, and countries is highlighted, especially as it relates to scope of practice of the social work field which varies between countries. Specifics of chapter topics are overviewed with suggestions to the reader on how to approach this book. Though the book explicitly focuses on social work, many other professionals will find this publication useful including group therapists, counselors, psychologists, creative arts therapists, psychodramatists, community workers, supervisors, and professors.

Keywords Social work · Sociometry · Psychodrama · Group work · Experiential therapy

This book aims to integrate Moreno's methods into the social work field. Social work and Moreno's methods, specifically sociometry and psychodrama, remain largely unintegrated. An attempt is made throughout this book to outline the congruent histories, philosophies, theories, and practices of social work, sociometry, and psychodrama. Both sociometric and psychodramatic processes will be presented with emphasis on their usefulness in clinical social work practice with individuals, groups, communities, organizations, supervision, and education. Though this book will explicitly address social workers, it is also applicable for group therapists, community leaders, drama therapists, creative arts therapists, psychologists, counselors, coaches, supervisors, and educators.

The idea for this book emerged from my own professional journey. After completing my master's in social work, I threw myself into intensive psychodrama training. Upon completion of my psychodrama certification, I returned to pursue a doctorate in clinical social work. Tasked with assignments about social work history, philosophy, and theory, I hunted through the academic literature for publications about the connection between sociometry, psychodrama, and social work but found nearly nothing had been written on the topic in English. There are several related German publications on the topic however (Böcker, 2004; Dannheiser, 2007;

Engelke, 1981; Müller, 2009; Neudorfer, 2014; Niepenberg, 2017; Ramsauer, 2007; Schwinger, 2014, 2016; Stimmer, 2004; Zwilling, 2004). It seemed I had unexpectedly encountered a major gap in the (English) literature base. I decided to devote my doctoral dissertation to the topic and created an MSW course curriculum to disseminate my findings on the overlap between social work with groups and Moreno's methods (Giacomucci, 2019b). My dissertation is the foundation of this book concept, though the majority of the content in this book is new.

In the past few years, the social work field seems to have a newfound interest in the creative arts therapies, *non-deliberative* or action-based approaches, and psychodrama (Giacomucci, 2019b; Heinonen, Halonen, & Krahn, 2018; Sulman, Sullivan, & Nosko, 2016). This is evidenced in multiple ways including an increased number of psychodrama presentations at social work conferences at the state, national, and international levels. Perhaps a more objective measure of this is the *social work with groups* journal hosting special issues focused on non-deliberative social work in 2016, social work and the arts in 2018, and psychodrama in 2020. Moreno's methods would fall within each one of these categories which shows an increased receptibility and interest within the social work with groups community. The number of English publications specific to social work, sociometry, and psychodrama has increased each year since 2017. The International Association of Social Work with Groups (IASWG) has created a new annual event at their symposium focused on non-deliberative social work (a category that psychodrama would fall within). Furthermore, in 2017 there was not a single course devoted to sociometry and psychodrama taught within a social work department in the USA (though many existed decades ago). As of 2020, at least two psychodrama courses are being taught in graduate social work programs in the USA (Bryn Mawr College and Yeshiva University). This book was written to serve as a textbook for a psychodrama course for social workers or other professionals.

The number of social workers with certification in sociometry, psychodrama, and group psychotherapy has also increased significantly in the past decade. In 2011, 11% of certified psychodramatists were social workers (Konopik & Cheung, 2013); however, in 2020 that has jumped to almost 30% (ABESPGP, 2020). Although social work is one of the most represented mental health fields within the USA psychodrama community, sociometry and psychodrama receive very little attention within the social work field in the USA. In other countries too, it seems that many psychodramatists hold degrees or licenses in social work; however, there has not been much attention given to a systematic exploration of the social work and psychodrama intersection, especially at a theoretical level. The richness of psychodrama remains mostly unharvested by social workers today. This book delivers social workers with a historical, theoretical, and practical understanding of how to use the theory and experiential processes from sociometry and psychodrama in social work practice.

1.1 USA and International Contexts

This book is primarily presented from my perspective as a US-based social worker and psychodramatist attempting to incorporate an awareness of how the fields of both social work and psychodrama have fundamental differences in other countries. This book is also partially limited by my inability to read non-English languages. I have done my best to access sources relevant to this book in other languages and include reference to them when appropriate.

In the USA, it is common practice for social workers to provide clinical services and psychotherapy, but this may not be the case in every part of the world. Although this book depicts the use of sociometry and psychodrama methods for social workers in clinical settings, it is important that each reader practices within the scope of their licensure and understands the boundaries of their practice based on the governing bodies and codes of ethics of their own countries.

It is my belief that the social work and psychodrama communities in the USA have much to offer professional communities in other countries—and that we have much more to learn from our international colleagues. This is especially true when it comes to psychodrama. Although psychodrama initially took root and developed in the USA, the US psychodrama community has failed to grow and professionalize in many ways (Giacomucci, 2019a). International psychodrama communities in Europe, South America, Asia, and Australia have outgrown psychodramatists in the USA in the areas including numbers of members, psychodrama research, embedding psychodrama in academia, and integrating psychodrama into mainstream group therapy, psychology, social work, and counseling fields. Internationally, there are entire graduate degrees awarded in the study of sociometry, psychodrama, and group psychotherapy, including in Israel, England, Spain, and Bulgaria; and at the same time, it is difficult to find mention of sociometry or psychodrama academic institutions in the USA. In some countries, Moreno's methods are widely accepted but in the USA they remain largely unknown.

1.1.1 *Cultural Contexts*

The practice of any method is embedded within a specific cultural context. Regardless of one's approach, it is important to consider the cultural context and contemplate ways that the approach can be modified when working with different cultural groups or multicultural groups. Zerka Moreno states that “warming-up to psychodrama may proceed differently from culture to culture and appropriate changes in the application of the method have to be made” (1965/2006, p. 108). Culture has a considerable impact on communication (verbal and non-verbal), social norms, belief, physical contact, value systems, politics, religion, gender roles, power, and meaning making. Both social work and Moreno's methods initially emerged within the framework of

western perspective (European/USA). Although psychodrama was primarily developed in the USA, it seems that the highly individualistic and medicalized culture may have significantly contributed to the decline of psychodrama's popularity (among other factors). However, at the same time, it appears that psychodrama's popularity has greatly increased in continents that have a more collective and communal culture—especially in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. It also seems that the practice of psychodrama in the USA and Western Europe is more focused on psychotherapy while psychodrama practice in other countries encompasses psychotherapy and non-clinical contexts including public community sessions, social activism, and politics (Fürst, 2006).

The psychodramatic approach honors the perspectives and experiences of each participant while supporting individuals in their own process of meaning making. Psychodrama is inherently focused on process, creativity, spontaneity, and largely rooted in a postmodern framework (Oudijk, 2007)—all of which make it more easily adaptable for different content, populations, and cultural contexts (Fürst, 2006). At the same time, because of its emphasis on action and group work, it may be even more important in group therapy and psychodrama to consider cultural contexts than with other approaches (Bustamante, 1961). Nieto (2010) presents an anti-oppression approach to inform psychodrama which emphasizes the need for awareness and respect of differences in social identity. Specific aspects of psychodrama practice that may need to be modified for different cultures include the use of physical touch, religion or spirituality, expressions of anger or conflict (especially toward parents), disclosing family issues, and recognizing personal strengths (Fürst, 2006; Gong, 2004; Hudgins & Toscani, 2013; Lai, 2011, 2013; Lai & Tsai, 2014; Ottomeyer, 2003).

I believe it is important for me to acknowledge my own cultural bias and limited experience in most cultural systems around the world. This book is written based on my own experience practicing in the USA, learning primarily from psychodramatists in the USA, and teaching primarily in the USA with occasional presentations for international audiences. While this book may be a source of new learning related to the theory and practice of Morenean methods, I urge readers to critically consider the applicability of each process in this book to the cultural context(s) in which you work. Readers are encouraged to develop new adaptations of sociometry and psychodrama methods to better meet the needs of diverse populations.

1.2 What Are Sociometry and Psychodrama?

Though future chapters will provide extensive descriptions of sociometry (Chap. 155) and psychodrama (Chap. 6), I will introduce the concepts briefly here. Throughout this book, the founder of sociometry and psychodrama will be referred to with various names including “Moreno,” “Jacob Moreno,” Jacob L. Moreno,” “Dr. Jacob L. Moreno,” “J.L. Moreno,” and “J.L.” (See Fig. 1.1). These names are used interchangeably within the psychodrama community when talking about Moreno, and I

Fig. 1.1 Jacob Moreno ascending the psychodrama stage. Reprinted with permission from Figusch (2014)

have also used each of them when referencing Moreno throughout the book. Both sociometry and psychodrama exist within the triadic system developed by Dr. Jacob L. Moreno—sociometry, psychodrama, and group psychotherapy. Quite often, the term “psychodrama” is used when referring to the entire triadic system. From a Morenean perspective, each element of the triadic system is intimately connected and emerged from Moreno’s existential philosophy (Moreno, 2019). Though he is often neglected in the group therapy literature, J.L. Moreno actually coined the terms “group therapy” and “group psychotherapy” in 1932 (Moreno, 1957). His approach to group therapy emphasizes action over analysis and was based on his early mystical experiences, his development of the Theater of Spontaneity, and the sociometric ideas—all of which emerged in the early 1900s.

Sociometry is defined as the study of group dynamics, the evolution of groups, and the network of relationships within groups (Moreno, 1953). Moreno’s sociometric system offers a theory of society and interpersonal relations, a research methods for studying the nature of groups and relationships, and experiential practices for assessing and promoting change within and between individuals and groups (Hale, 2009; Nolte, 2014). Sociometry facilitates both written and/or action-based group assessment using a variety of novel instruments. While psychology and psychodrama are focused on psychodynamics, sociometry emphasizes the sociodynamic realm of experience. Most psychodrama group sessions begin with action-based sociometry processes to initiate a warm-up, explore group dynamics, and establish the topic of the psychodrama enactment (Giacomucci, 2020).

Psychodrama is most often described as an experiential approach that integrates aspects of psychotherapy and role playing techniques to externalize intrapersonal or interpersonal issues. Psychodrama is primarily recognized as a form of psychotherapy, but it is also used extensively outside of clinical settings. Psychodrama sessions generally involve a protagonist, a director, role players, a stage of some sort, and an audience. The story of a protagonist is dramatized using unique role playing techniques including doubling, soliloquy, self-presentation, mirroring, and role reversal. Psychodramas vary greatly in their size, length, number of scenes, goals, topics, settings, orientation to time (past, present, and/or future), and the nature of the roles (intrapsychic, interpersonal, spiritual, axiological, etc.).

After the completion of a psychodrama, participants de-role and return to the group as themselves. The final group phase is focused on personal sharing related to the psychodrama enactment. This sharing phase almost resembles more traditional talk therapy group sessions, however during the sharing phase of a psychodrama group, analysis or intellectualization is discouraged in favor of authentic sharing about one’s own experience.

Moreno’s methods have largely been separated from each other, from their underlying philosophy, and from their founder. Moreno (see Fig. 1.2) published his first nine books anonymously, inspired by his spiritual beliefs. As a result, it was easy for others to take his ideas and claim them as their own. Morenean philosophy directly challenges and contradicts psychoanalysis, the medical model, individualism, and capitalism. It seems that these philosophical differences may have contributed to the separation of Moreno’s philosophy from his methods by many practitioners in the

Fig. 1.2 Jacob Moreno in 1925 in Vienna. Reprinted with permission from Figusch ([2014](#))

USA. Furthermore, as his methods penetrated the larger culture, the triadic system fell apart as some fields absorbed one element but not the others. For example, sociology and social network researchers adopted ideas of sociometry without giving second thoughts to psychodrama or group psychotherapy. Similarly, the group therapy world largely ignores sociometry and psychodrama. And multiple fields, such as education, coaching, organizational leadership, gestalt therapy, encounter groups, and therapeutic communities have incorporated aspects of psychodrama, particularly role playing and the empty chair technique, without also integrating sociometry or Morenean philosophy. Moreno believed that his work had been cannibalized at the expense of its reputation (Moreno, [2014](#)).

1.3 Social Work with Groups

This book will primarily focus on group work, but also contains sections on using sociometry and psychodrama in one-to-one sessions, work with communities or organizations, and social work education and supervision. Throughout the book, the terms “social work with groups,” “social group work,” and “group work” will be used interchangeably. “Group therapy” and “group psychotherapy” will also be used interchangeably. While group therapy is focused on clinical applications of group work within a therapeutic context, social group work has a wider orientation that encompasses group therapy, community group work, educational groups, skill-building groups, task groups, social action groups, remedial groups, supervisory groups, and training groups. Clinical applications of sociometry and psychodrama will be primarily emphasized throughout the examples in each chapter, nevertheless these approaches are also used in non-clinical or non-therapeutic social work settings.

Social workers are experiencing increased expectations to facilitate groups in their careers while receiving little to no formal education, training, or supervision specific on group work. Social work students and graduates are being placed in internships and jobs where they are expected to facilitate group psychotherapy without specialized skills training necessary to work competently in group settings (Knight, 2017). The resulting consequences limit the quality of treatment that clients receive, the preparedness of MSWs to work in their field, and social workers’ feelings of competence and confidence in their professional roles (Clements, 2008; Kammerman, 2011; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) does not require devoted courses in group work in their accreditation requirements for MSW programs. The CSWE required competencies include “assessing,” “intervening,” and “evaluating practice” “with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities,” but do not explicitly highlight the importance of education and training related to group work on its own (CSWE, 2015, p. 8). Renowned existential therapist and group expert Irving Yalom implores that:

It is abundantly clear that, as time passes, we will rely on group approaches ever more heavily. I believe that any psychotherapy training program that does not acknowledge this and does not expect students to become as fully proficient in group as in individual therapy is failing to meet its responsibilities to the field. (2005, p. 544).

I wholeheartedly agree with Yalom and encourage CSWE to reconsider the place of group work within social work education as its own specialty with unique knowledge and skills that differentiate it from work with individuals, families, organizations, and communities. My hope is that this book might help embed Moreno’s methods in social work academia while also helping to fortify social worker practitioners with knowledge, resources, and action-based group work tools. The rich tradition of J.L. Moreno’s methods of sociometry and psychodrama, in addition to the many trauma-specific adaptations that have evolved from them, offers social workers the much-needed clinical skills and sociometric understanding to safely and competently facilitate psychotherapy groups (Giacomucci, 2018a, b; Giacomucci & Stone, 2019; Skolnik, 2018). Sociometry and psychodrama methods would fall within the

larger category of “non-deliberative” methods of social work practice which seems to be increasing in popularity in the social work with groups community (Lang, 2016; Sulman, Sullivan, & Nosko, 2016).

This book has been written in a way that integrates both the foundational knowledge of a social worker and a psychodramatist. Social work and social group work core concepts have been emphasized including person-in-environment perspective, the biopsychosocial-spiritual model, mutual aid, the centrality of relationships, and social justice. Entire chapters have been devoted to outlining Moreno’s methods within the essential social work themes of trauma (Chap. 7), neurobiology (Chap. 8), the strengths-based approach (Chap. 9), and evidence-based practice (Chap. 10).

1.4 Social Workers and Beyond

This book will predominately focus on integrating Moreno’s methods into the social work field. Nevertheless, the philosophies, theories, and practices of social work, sociometry, and psychodrama are each relevant and adaptable for other fields including psychology, counseling, group therapy, marriage and family therapy, drama therapy, the other creative arts therapies, community organizing, and education. Psychology, counseling, and marriage and family therapy, dominated by traditional talk therapies or cognitive behavioral therapy, can benefit from the experiential approaches offered by sociometry and psychodrama. The creative arts therapies, which already are based on expressive and experiential methods, will find sociometry and psychodrama to be complimentary to their practices. At the same time, social work’s emphasis on relationships, person-in-environment, biopsychosocial-spiritual perspectives, mutual aid, social justice, and the integration of clinical, group, and community practices can all serve to enhance the practice of non-social work professionals.

As an expert in traumatic stress, I have also included considerable content related to using psychodrama for both trauma-informed ways and trauma-focused practices. Trauma is not the primary focus of this book, nevertheless, a trauma-informed perspective is incorporated throughout each chapter. The use of a trauma-informed clinical map and trauma-focused psychodrama models are emphasized. It has been my experience that many veteran social workers (and other professionals) have had adverse experiences or misconceptions about psychodrama specifically related to its use in ways that were harmful or not very trauma-informed (Giacomucci, 2018c). By emphasizing trauma throughout the book, my hope is to renegotiate some of psychodrama’s reputation in the social work community.

Though this publication attempts to present the fullness of psychodramatic philosophy, theory, and practice, pieces of it can be easily integrated into the repertoires of other professionals. It is expected that a minority of readers of this book will be implementing the psychodrama as a comprehensive system. But instead, most readers will be interested in adapting various aspects of sociometry and psychodrama into their work. The chapters of this book have been written in a way to speak to

both types of readers. Furthermore, the experiential processes of sociometry and psychodrama are applicable in a range of spaces beyond psychotherapy and clinical settings. Chapter 20 is devoted to the use of sociometry and psychodrama by supervisors, educators, and leaders as experiential teaching processes.

1.5 Concerning Psychodramatists

This book includes the foundations of sociometry and psychodrama, as well as advanced content for psychodramatists. Psychodrama trainees preparing for their written exam will find this book a valuable resource as it encompasses each of the areas on the board of examiner's examination. In the production of the book, I have attempted to create content that would not only be useful for social workers, but for psychodrama students and advanced psychodrama practitioners. New contributions to the psychodrama literature base have been offered throughout each chapter of this book. Psychodramatists will also find the underlying philosophy, theory, and core values of social work as complimentary to their psychodrama praxis.

Drawing from Jacob Moreno's newly published *Autobiography of a Genius* (2019), I have infused novel content on psychodrama history and sociatry throughout this book. The early history chapters (Chaps. 2 and 3) of this publication contain a comprehensive timeline of psychodrama, social work, and group therapy in the contexts of the larger fields of medicine, psychology, and social history. This is perhaps the most comprehensive timeline of psychodrama that has been created. Furthermore, the chapter devoted to Morenean philosophy (Chap. 4) is one of the most complete summaries of sociatry and Moreno's mystical tradition. Little has been written about sociatry or Moreno's mysticism beyond the writings of Zerka and Jacob Moreno. Unaware of the existential philosophies from which psychodrama and sociometry emerged, many professionals, including psychodramatists, unintentionally utilize Morenean methods while divorcing them from the philosophy that they originated from.

1.6 How to Read This Book

This book has been written in a way that each section and each chapter might stand on their own. Some readers may choose to read isolated chapters or sections within this book that speak to their specific research or practice interests. My only caution to these readers is related to the unintended consequence of perpetuating the further separation of Moreno's methods from his philosophy and theory. I encourage readers to consider Chaps. 4–6 as an essential foundation to fully understanding the later sections devoted to the practice of sociometry and psychodrama with groups, individuals, and communities.

The first section of the book (Chaps. 2 and 3) is devoted to the histories of social work and psychodrama. Historians of group work, social work, and psychodrama will find these chapters of interest. The second section of the book (Chaps. 4–6) orients itself upon the philosophical and theoretical intersections of sociometry, psychodrama, and social work. Chapter 4 also includes significant content related to the codes of ethic of social workers. Section 3 (Chap. 7–10) dissect major themes in social work practice (trauma, neurobiology, strengths-based, and evidence-based practice and explore them within the contexts of social work, group therapy, and psychodrama. Sections 4–6 are primarily practice-oriented and include case depictions, vignettes, and example prompts of using sociometry and psychodrama within social work practice with individuals, groups, and communities. Section 4 (Chaps. 11–15) outlines the use of sociometry and psychodrama within group work. A subsection devoted to Yalom’s therapeutic factors of group therapy is included in Chap. 12—I hope this might help provide common language for psychodramatists and group therapists. Chapter 14 offers advanced psychodrama directing strategies that experienced psychodramatists will find of great interest. And the final chapter of this section (Chap. 15) offers short descriptions of other experiential approaches that are similar to psychodrama. This includes approaches that are directly emerged from psychodrama (sociodrama, social microscopy, axiodrama, etc.), as well as approaches similar to psychodrama with varying degrees of overlap (drama therapy, Playback Theater, Theater of the Oppressed, Gestalt Therapy, Internal Family Systems, etc.). Section 5 (Chap. 16–16) is devoted to one-to-one work using sociometric and psychodramatic methods. Practitioners that primarily provide individual psychotherapy services will find this section most helpful. The sixth section (Chap. 18–20) includes chapters on community, organizational, and educational applications of sociometry, sociodrama, and role training. This section is written with community organizers, organizational leaders, supervisors, and educators in mind. The final chapter of this book is a psychodramatic letter inspired by my vision of a future where the social work field has fully integrated Moreno’s methods into its professional repertoire. In this future projection, I have role reversed with a social work leader in 2074, on the 100th anniversary of Jacob Moreno’s death, reflecting on the concretized potentialities of Moreno’s methods absorbed within all aspects of the social work field (see Fig. 1.3).

Fig. 1.3 Intersecting aspects of social work and Moreno's methods

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