The dictatorship of love relationships

Exploring the love model in psychodrama

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Abstract This article aims to draw attention to a social organization which impels us to the search for a type of life organization, for the satisfaction of our attachment needs; recognition; belonging; acceptance; and finally well-being or even happiness, by means of conjugality relations or love relations. It is expected, in addition, for those relationships to be the basic support of what is called “nuclear family”. On the other hand, is also underlined that this kind of relationships is so conditioned by the religious, legal regulatory bodies, and even by science that becomes possible to typify the outbreaks of malaise leading to support requests. The authors elect psychodrama as the social/group and individual reflection model on analyzing these relationships and organization.

Keywords Couples · Psychodrama · Love · Support community · Attachment · Sexual attraction

Die Diktatur der Liebesbeziehungen

Erforschung des Liebesmodells im Psychodrama

Zusammenfassung Dieser Artikel zielt darauf ab, die Aufmerksamkeit auf eine soziale Organisationsweise zu lenken, die uns zur Suche nach einer Art von Lebensorganisation, zur Befriedigung unserer Bindungsbedürfnisse, Anerkennung, Zugehörigkeit, Annahme und schließlich Wohlbefinden oder sogar Glück durch Ehebe-

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ziehungen oder Liebesbeziehungen bringt. Es wird ergänzend erwartet, dass diese Beziehungen die grundlegende Unterstützung der sogenannten „Kernfamilie“ sind. Auf der anderen Seite wird auch unterstrichen, dass diese Art von Beziehungen von den religiösen, gesetzlichen Regulierungsstellen und sogar von der Wissenschaft so bedingt ist, dass es möglich wird, die Ausbrüche von Unwohlsein zu charakterisieren, was zu Anfragen nach Beratung und Psychotherapie führt. Die AutorInnen wählen Psychodrama als Sozial-/Gruppen- und Individuumbezogenes Reflexionsmodell zur Analyse dieser Beziehungen und Organisation.

Schlüsselwörter Paare · Psychodrama · Liebe · Unterstützende Gemeinschaft · Bindung · Sexuelle Anziehung

1 Introduction

In this text, we reflect on the imposition of the loving organization as a preferential relation of social and personal structuring. This relationship is the one which is associated with maturity and healthy psychological development. Moreover is associated with happiness.

We ask ourselves if this social representation is the cause of so many emotional disorders. Other people's desire is not satisfied through commitment, it doesn't depend exclusively on the effort of one of both sides. To promote a desire which is not uniquely achievable by oneself, is this not a way of, in some cases, promoting the development of adults with little quality of life?

Examples of complaints coming from clinical context are given, as empirical support base to illustrate the personal difficulties and the models presented. In the end are set out some possibilities of work on these themes through the psychodramatic model, considering it is the model par excellence for the analysis and reflection on this subject.

2 Love relation valued as the preferential relationship of attachment and the one with privileged social organization

It is relatively consensual the assumption of human beings' needs of attachment, belonging, acceptance, recognition, care, company, cooperation, mutual help, support. More dissonant is the form these needs should be met, and it is here, on their satisfaction, that societies are organized. The most common form found in Western society in the last century and, especially on the bourgeoisie, is the so-called “nuclear family”; that is, a family group consisting of two adults and their children. Originally these two adults were of different sexes, the children were biological and of both parents, or adopted by the couple. In the last decades this concept has widened, now includes adults of the same sex and children of one or the other element of the couple.

We find exceptions to this organization in “nuclear family” in the religious orders, which force to live in a closed community, although not isolated from the world.

However, also in this case the dictatorship of an exclusive form of organization is observed.

We are not questioning this model, by no means. But we ask ourselves about the non-existence of others, with equal social valorization and, underlining this condition of equal valorization, under penalty of being considered alternatives to fill a gap. We are referring, for example, to “support communities” that meet the aforementioned needs: avoid isolation and promote various types of attachment, where relationships of support, help, assistance, sharing, and safety are facilitated by the very structure of space. Think of a structure of condominiums that simultaneously promotes privacy and individuality, and sharing and sociability, and each person may choose to use common or private spaces. The organization itself does not contemplate other structures.

We are impregnated, since birth, with an expectation of pairing. Being alone is regarded as something bad, undesirable. Almost all of us hear from an early age statements like “poor thing, you’re going to be alone at home”, “poor me, you leave me here alone”. Later, in adolescence the repeated question: “So, do you already have a boyfriend/girlfriend?”, fortunately changing, usually with the expectation that the partner is of a different sex from the person to whom the question is asked.

With this “social imposition”, regulated by expressions used on a daily basis such as: “So, have you already arranged your life?”, “Have you already¹ married?” or “So, do you have someone?” Little room is left for personal choice without shame, without guilt, without a sense of devaluation, when someone makes another choice of life organization.

The right to choose is a speech of present times and still with difficulty of acceptance, even by the person himself. Shame and guilt, in the sense of self-stigma, are often feelings that are an obstacle to the use of this right. Even more painful are the situations in which this desire is also an individual desire and cannot be achieved. We know that the choice of living with the partner depends not only on the desire of one of the partners. It is necessary that both partners have the same desire.

3 Expectations about the functioning of a love relation

We have been held hostage by a society that has been organized around couple relationships, we have recently called “loving”², and that makes us believe that our happiness depends on them. We extend love relations to organizations other than the heterosexual one, we open them to non-monogamy, but still, the same model remains: the notion of a structured and happy adult being is still that of which that being is capable of having a love relation and preferably a long-term relationship.

¹ We stress the adverb “already”, because it denounces not just what is expected to have already happened, but also what is supposed to happen.

² We will use indistinctly the terms “love relations” and “couple relationships”, assuming that today the term “love” has undergone a semantic expansion, having become love or its affirmation a necessary condition for the formation of a relationship as a couple.

Associated with other factors, it is also this idea that often encloses people in relationships where they are very mistreated, to be with another person in conjugality is to “have family spirit”, is to guarantee not “being alone”, is “to have my life”, and this is seen and felt as more important than the quality of the relationship:

I’m afraid to break up, he says he kills my parents. I maintain the relationship because I’m afraid of how he’ll treat my children. He says that marriage is for life and that I have no family spirit. (Gabriela, 38 years old)

It was 30 years of disrespect and beatings (I was never valued), he never liked me, but without him I would be alone and that would be even harder. (Teodora, 65 years old)

I prefer this relationship, where he mistreats me (beats and steals), rather than be seen without a relationship, it would embarrass me, and I know I don’t have much ease in making connections. At least, I’m married. At least, sometimes someone comes home and at times I have that company for dinner. I had a good life at my parents, with my brothers, but I want to have my own life so much. (Ana Teresa, 30 years old)

It is not just a question of having love relations. It is to have them with some continuity. The notion of ephemeral is associated with inability, uncertainty, and personal failure. The idea that continuity is better than ephemerality leads to feelings of malaise, “failure”, doubt about sexual orientation and even gender identity³ and loss of meaning of life:

I cannot maintain a relationship, I get fed up, I don’t have the patience. I like insecure women, but then I don’t like their dependency. I get fed up. I don’t know if I’ll ever keep a relationship. I feel sorry and I feel lonely. I feel little integrated and I’m ashamed of other people’s eyes upon me. It’s as if I had a flaw. (André, 40)

I cannot have a long-lasting relationship—I’m always left, I have a fault, people care about me and then they give up ... I’ve already wondered if I am homosexual, if I’m really a woman (sometimes I wonder if I am a bit of a tomboy), I have already made changes in my body to be more desirable ... I need to share my life with someone I love and who loves me, for whom I feel desired and who I desire. Is not this how it should be? Without it my life does not make sense. I really think about ending it. (Catarina, 55 years old)

One of the justifications for the valorization of long-term relationships has to do with the interpretation, assumed by biology, biological anthropology, and other sciences, that the feeling of sexual desire has the function of continuing the species. It is considered that the ultimate purpose of sexual desire is reproduction, and to this is added a certain kind of structure of life organization, combining the conjugal system with the reproductive system and the parental system, and linking them through cohabitation. Reproduction was in the past the justification of sexuality and the reason for the couple’s constitution. However, at present, although love

³ We observe ignorance relating to the subjects of sexual orientation and gender identity, being the prejudice in first place.

has ceased to have this reproductive obligation and often reproduction is not even an issue, the requirement of sexuality remains in the couples of the present time, making their absence to be felt like a failure⁴, despite all reorganizations found for the notion of couple.

Although some authors, such as Zapiain (2009), clarify the separation between the sexual system⁵ and the attachment system, it is normatively supposed that love relations integrate sexual desire⁶ and the experience of a shared sexuality⁷. It is assumed that it is the erotic encounter what distinguishes these relationships from friendship “we live like two friends”, or from fraternal relations, “our relationship is like that of two brothers”, or the stereotype of what is the sexuality of the elders, “we look like an elderly couple.”

Since sexuality is considered a constituent component of love relations, the complaints about its absence are very common and can be classified, fundamentally, into two groups: malaise because there’s no desire towards the partner or rarely there is some desire and the malaise for not being the object of desire of the partner or rarely being. From whom has no desire there is a sense of failure, of non-performance. The one who’s not desired doubts about being loved, getting the idea that there is lack of commitment, dedication, even listening, or perceives this absence as partner’s disorder. We illustrate below some testimonies with complaints of these two types, in relationships considered “very good” and that are disqualified by the way the sexuality is lived:

1. Malaise because there is no desire for the partner or feeling it rarely

I can not imagine living without her (my wife) because she helps me to organize my life, but I don’t feel any sexual interest. Sometimes, with a lot of effort on my part, we have a sexual encounter, but it’s for her. (Marco, 41 years old)
It’s an exceptional relationship, we get along very well, but sexually it’s very difficult. She is the woman I want to live with but her body do not arouses me. I can only have sex in one position without feeling her body, without seeing the breasts. Her skin is unpleasant to me. (Rebelo, 45)
I like him very much, our life is great, but I rarely want to waste time with sex. I say waste time because that’s what I feel, unfortunately. I’m sorry to feel that way, but this is it. I wish it was different, but when I think about my life as a whole, sexuality has never really interested me. I’ve always had other

⁴ We do not want to question sexual desire or those who wish to feel it in the couple relationship. What we question is its imposition. Not infrequently a standard frequency of sexual encounter is even imposed. What we want to make clear is that we believe that each person knows how to live their relationship(s) and has the right to live them as he or she wants, not because this is how it should be, but because that is their choice. It is often from what is considered “ought to be” that many power games and abuse are developed.

⁵ According to this perspective, the sexual system integrates “the desire for erotic experience, sexual satisfaction, the search for corporal pleasure” (Zapiain 2009, p. 215)

⁶ The infatuation, the most commonly type of love desired, is exactly characterized by some authors by the intense presence of desire (Sternberg 1995; Perel 2006).

⁷ The attachment system integrates the “tendency to attachment, to contact, to total fusion with the other, in search of a person who functions as an essential reference in security, tranquility and emotional stability” (Zapiain 2009, p. 215)

priorities. Sexual encounters are good. I have a lot of pleasure, but that's when I'm in the mood. There are so many things that, for me, are priorities. I come here for him. Because to him sex is very important and I feel he is very sad. (Jacinta, 36 years old)

2. Malaise for not being the object of desire of the partner or rarely being

Our relationship is exceptional but I need to feel erotically desired. I haven't been desired for 10 years. Why doesn't she do anything even knowing that? I know that if I go to her, she reacts, but it's only because I went to her and it's to satisfy me. She's never coming to me, desiring me. I do not want her to please me, I want her to want me. Since she doesn't want me or doesn't do anything for it, I also can't do anything. Maybe she has a problem. Why doesn't she listen to me? Why doesn't she see my suffering? (Patrícia, 42 years old)

She doesn't get excited, she has no interest. She satisfies me, and that's it. If she really liked me she would make an effort. (Ricardo, 43 years old)

I have a marvelous life but I feel that I need to be grabbed, I need to feel his desire. I'm languishing, everything is always the same and without excitement, without enthusiasm. I would like him (sorry) to grab my breasts, for example, and tell me how much he wants them ... to tell me arousing words. We have sex now and then, but it's always the same and I feel like he has no desire. It seems like he meets the duty. (Irene, 59 years old)

The relationship with the families of origin is another subject, as in the previous ones, where there are a series of assumptions and that can be a source of tension. Some examples of these assumptions are the conviction that "a couple should do everything together"; "all the elements of the family must be present at the celebrations"; "couples should have time for themselves" and that if they are not observed, they turn into malaise and into complaints. The way each element of the couple, the couple themselves, and the family nucleus relate to the families of origin can cause great distress. We illustrate some of the common complaints on this subject:

She wants to spend her time off at her parents and uncles' home. There's never time for us. (Viana, 37 years old)

He comes with me to my family's home but he always shows a face of displeasure. (Selene, 36 years old)

She never wants to come to my family's home, nor parents neither uncles who I love so much, do you think this is normal in a couple? (Francisco, 53 years old)

He is always worried about his mother and sisters, on the important dates (Christmas, New Year's Eve, birthdays), they always come in first place. (Doroteia, 32 years old)

It is common in love relations, as Montoro (2004) points out, "the nostalgia to take on the role of the beloved son unconditionally, and to project into the spouse the symbology of a perfect *placenta-mother* that nourishes with good things and

removes toxins from daily life”⁸ (p. 104). The lack of a look of appreciation and of recognition is a frequent complaint, being both considered indicators of acceptance and love:

Nothing that I do is recognized, it is as if I only fulfilled what is expected. (Joaquim, 42 years old and Maria, 40 years old)

I hear nothing but complaints. There is no compliment. As if it didn't do anything right. I always feel like I failed. There's not even caresses. (Joana, 37 years old)

I'm not heard. All my desires are devalued. Nothing I like is taken into account. I often repeat what disturbs me and nothing different happens. (Alba, 35 years old)

The expectations of what a love relation must be are so powerful, that the power games, in order to lead the other to correspond (“an adult doesn't react like that”, “you're immature”, “that's not from a person who loves the other”, etc.) are too common, undermining everyday life and often settling as a mission of one of the elements of the couple to lead the other to feel the malaise that one feels.

Barberá (2004) and Población (2013) point the importance of opening room in couple therapies to clarify how power games constitute a form of daily violence. Barberá proposes to include several steps in the intervention procedure: “to help in the recognition that the struggle for power is a form of violence; to make contact with the authorship and the mechanisms that each of them uses; make possible the reverse roles/role reverse⁹, allowing each one to experience the other's way of playing” (Barberá 2004, p. 229).

If it is true that, according to some instances of social regulation, the notion of love/couple relation is clearly defined, as is the case of the religious or legal perspective (see, for example, the notion of cohabitation in the legal case, which leads to the concept of family home; in the religious case, the notion of “for life”, which makes divorce a failure, or even an impossibility), it is also true that outside these bodies there are no other social systems to dictate how to organize love relations. However, those perspectives contaminate most relationships by creating expectations that relate to those principles.

Several authors throughout history have attempted to define and map love relations. As an example, and to have a base model, we can summon the work of Sternberg (1995), a research on love, where, based on factorial analyses, he proposes his triangular theory that has as main factors passion, intimacy, and commitment. Passion refers to erotic desire, sexual attraction, and to satisfaction with the erotic experience. Intimacy integrates communication, understanding, and respect, as well as feelings of attachment, unity, closeness and emotional support, the desire for

⁸ Translations from Portuguese and Spanish are made by Matias Braga and G. M.

⁹ “Role-reversal is the engine that drives the psychodrama. The protagonist models the role of significant other in the group, and then a group member moves in to play that role. Through crucial role-reversals, the protagonist experiences a shift in the role boundary by playing another person. The person being the auxiliary ego holds the role that has been set and creates within it, as they imagine the person in that role would play it. The role is played through the perception of the protagonist.” (Karp 2017, p. 11)

well-being of the other, etc. The commitment implies the decision to want the other, the will expressed in behaviors to maintain the union and the implicit and explicit commitments of personal and social character.

From the combination of these three components, Sternberg organizes seven types of love: Infatuation, characterized primarily by sexual attraction; Liking, characterized by the predominance of the relationship of communication, understanding and emotional support; Empty Love, the almost exclusive component is the decision to love each other, what they do together and personal and social commitments; Romantic Love, whose components are mainly passion and intimacy; Companionate Love, where the passion is absent but there is intimacy and commitment; Fatuous Love, the one in which passion and commitment dominate but there is no intimacy, and finally Consummate Love, the one that integrates the three components of love at a high level.

What is dramatic in all the examples above is that it is very difficult to be spontaneous¹⁰, to have individual and social freedom, so one can find the individual possibilities and have enough creativity to build a lifestyle or a type of relationship or love relations of comfort and satisfaction, ignoring the standards of what is expected. The existence of a social “menu” that conditions us from the start towards the identification and recognition of standards, which, even being social, are already assumed by each one, makes it very difficult for us to get rid of the expectations and the consequence is a great malaise and the inability to find new answers.

4 The use of psychodrama as an instrument of analysis and social and personal transformation

The perspective of the human being that the psychodrama offers, that of a being capable of authorship, through the resources and possibilities of which it is endowed and through the creativity and spontaneity that characterizes it, calls into question the traditional models and makes it possible to find new and more functional forms of life organization.

The role theory, which is central in psychodrama, is very rich when we approach relationships. Any bond implies a role that has previous social existence and develops in interaction with its complementary role. Moreno defines role as the most basic cultural unit of conduct, in his own words: “Role can be defined as the actual and tangible forms which the self takes. We thus define the role as the functioning form the individual assumes in the specific moment he reacts to a specific situation

¹⁰ Moreno (1997) defines spontaneity as the ability of the individual to give adequate answers to new situations or new and adequate answers to old situations. During the session of sociodrama, this ability can be trained through the representation of situations that require the exercise of exploration of alternative solutions to the problems. This finding of new solutions and opportunities for personal development can constitute a moment of rediscovery, of insight, accompanied by a sense of emotional liberation, which Moreno designates as a Catharsis of Integration (Pio-Abreu and Villares-Oliveira 2007; Blatner and Cukier 2007). For Moreno (1997) the development of spontaneity thus contributes to the promotion of mental health, insofar as it allows the individual to act with adequacy, balance and without rigidity in the face of events.

in which other persons or objects are involved. The symbolic representation of this functioning form, perceived by the individual and others, is called the role” (Moreno 1961, p. 519).

Each role is a fusion between private elements and collective elements. Each person develops their role of lover in the experience of the relationship(s) between lovers. We know that each subject, and each pair, will develop it in his own way; however starting from a previously existing social script.

If intimacy consists of roles, communication and expectations, among other factors, and “the focus of psychodrama is precisely the subtleties of the interpersonal relationship” (Karp 1991, p. 133), the psychodramatic model and its techniques are the ideal instruments for analysis and work on bonds.

It is always enriching to make the group survey of the organization of life of its elements and their level of satisfaction; to propose, also, a search for alternative models to conjugal relations, without implying any exclusivity; and to think together how would be organized a society that contemplates other forms of organization with equal social value. These presentations can be made in small vignettes¹¹ or by means of play back theater¹², allowing to reflect on the construction of a society that is in the best interest of its elements, by offering multiple possibilities.

One of the riches of psychodrama is the possibility of giving a voice to the subject(s), to find different speeches on a certain theme, and work from these narratives. In the survey of the existing speeches in any group, we naturally accede to many of the discourses that exist in the social environment and we can identify who produces them, such as the religion, jurisprudence and science. We assume here the constructionist position of reproduction of a “social menu”. We believe that in this dynamic, new meanings can be found, new voices can be produced: it is the facilitation of spontaneity, which is the purpose of psychodrama.

For a survey on this topic, during the work with groups of psychodrama, we can ask its members, while they wander around the room, to focus on what does it mean a love relation for each one. From here, soliloquies¹³ are requested and the existing subgroups are organized according to this criterion (love relation). This is how the map of the definitions in that group is made. The spectrum of understandings of what a love relation is, that is found here, allows each participant to observe the diversity and, from it, to discuss, reflect and, as we are in psychodrama, to act.

We can, at this macro-sociodramatic level, while working with the subgroups, ask each subgroup to interact with the others, stressing from their understanding

¹¹ “A vignette is very simple a short form of psychodrama, perhaps consisting of only one scene, often a future projection or declaration of intend of some kind, rather than a full multi-scene classical psychodrama.” (Karp and Farrall 2014, p. 19)

¹² “Play-back theater is an original form of improvisational theatre in which audience or group members tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted on the spot.” (retrieved from <http://www.playbacktheatre.org/>, July 18, 2017).

¹³ “The soliloquy is a significant technique that allows the scene to be effectively “frozen” into non-action for a while and this space and time gives the protagonist the possibility of entering into the interstices of their own conscience. Soliloquies help the protagonist achieve insightful thoughts on problems, or shed new light on suffering. Soliloquies are useful after traumatic events, or after an unexpected question, or an embarrassing request.” (Gasseau and Perotta 2017, p. 46)

as a group what are the needs felt in the relationship (“I wish ...”, “I need ...”) and to experience the corresponding emotion in each of the roles (reversing roles¹⁴ or undergoing different roles). These exchanges of needs may help to understand prejudices that lead to dogmatic interpretations suchlike “If ... then”: “If you love me then you have sexual desire for me”, “if you take care of me then you arrive for dinner on time”.

Several spectrograms¹⁵ can be developed either for the importance of love relations in life or for analyzing relationships, taking into account aspects that are usually relevant in relationships: levels of individuality and interdependence; self-centeredness or in the relationship (to be for the relationship/to be for yourself); fusion (indifferentiation)/individuality (I’m me, I’m not the other); closeness; space together/own space; families autonomy; differences in system of values; feel loved; confidence; sexual desire; sexual relation; exchange of thoughts/ideas; exchange of feelings; freedom to ask what is wished and other needs for the group participants.

The use of sculptures¹⁶ is very rich to analyze the differences between concepts among partnership, couple, love relations. And the meaning of each in social life and in individual life. This analysis can also be done with a proposal of movement, of dance, using music.

All this work can be done with the subgroups that make up a group, with couples or with a protagonist, in this case in a more personal and psychodramatic perspective.

5 Concluding notes

The course of this article leads us to conclude that we live in a double straitjacket. In the first place, we grow up in a model of society that values the organization of life in couples, in loving relationships. One may even accept the possibility of more than one type of relationship, questioning, as has already been done, this model of heteronormative compulsory monogamy. It is proposed network relationships with different types of organization, such as polyamory or free relationships. However, this notion of pairing is not questioned. The second straitjacket has to do with what is supposed to be a loving or a couple relationship. The beliefs about how time should be structured in relationships, about how they should integrate sexuality, how to deal with the families of origin, mutual care, housing, valuation and recognition, etc. Knowing the effect that beliefs play on attitudes, on the behavior, and particularly

¹⁴ See note 9.

¹⁵ “With a spectrogram a group of opinions is made into a specific criterion. The elaboration of a spectrogram is therefore a group dynamics technique of action sociometry and allows groups to come from a polar confrontation to a more differentiated confrontation. The spectrogram technique is closely related to the scenic scale work” (retrieved from <http://www.wiki.inscenario.de/doku.php?id=soziometrie:aktionssoziometrie:spektrogramm>, July 18, 2017; translated by M. W.)

¹⁶ “The protagonist uses his auxiliary-egos as a sculptor to work out his message. In this way, the protagonist uses them to illustrate a condensed message: s/he gives the other players body postures, gestures, facial expressions and sometimes a focused sentence or heading. The message of the sculpture becomes clear through the overall impression of the configuration and often embodies inner attitudes to something or to someone” (Bender and Stadler 2012, pp. 46–47; translated by M. W.)

on emotions, we question the social promotion and valorization of a particular type of life organization.

We don't intend to question the mating model, but rather its social demand, we therefore propose a group reflection on these social structures that are fed back by each one of us and do not always bring the promised satisfaction. The psychodramatic model is the model presented as the one that best satisfies this objective.

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