

# Looking Through the Lenses

*THE FOUR ASPECTS OF PSYCHODRAMA*

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## *ABSTRACT*

Techniques and theory used by the psychodramatist, sociodramatist, role trainer and sociometrist are the same. All aim to provide an experience that facilitates an effective learning or therapeutic outcome for clients. Where they differ is in their focus. This paper explores the different lens used by psychodramatists, sociodramatists, role trainers and sociometrists in their work in one to one process, the therapeutic relationship, group development, education and business.

## *KEY WORDS*

psychodrama, psychodramatic lens, role training, sociodrama, sociometry,

## **Introduction**

As I was developing my practice, I struggled with understanding the differences between the various Moreno approaches. I adopted a 'lens approach' to focus and develop my thinking, my analysis of a situation and my choices regarding the type of instrument to use. The lens I choose influences my approach, and the directions I provide. I feel enriched knowing that I am not limited in the way that I work. All approaches are valid, and are chosen according to the contract, the group and the protagonist. I am only limited by my imagination, understanding and role development to date.

As I warm up to being a creative writer, I think about group warm up and the language I use to produce a drama. During a drama, I may produce several scenes. I may start with social atom repair using sociometry and then move to work sociodramatically or to use role training. My choices are influenced by the protagonist, the issues present in the group and what I think will be an effective therapeutic or educational intervention.

Thinking then about some scenes that I can use to illustrate and discuss these different approaches, I have chosen a case study and some vignettes from a group of mothers I work with in a psycho-educational setting. I plan to view these through the different lenses and introduce the thinking from each perspective. I could equally use examples from the work place or an educational setting. In the later integrative phase of this article, I will discuss my thinking about the four lenses of psychodrama.

The mothers with whom I work wish to develop stronger relationships with themselves during difficult moments with their children. Their vision is to be loving, understanding and patient parents who never get angry or stressed. This mythical goal creates enormous pressure for them because in reality they experience themselves as controlling and yelling, as *screaming banshees*. Sometimes, frustrated and exasperated by tiredness, conflicted agendas, ongoing worries and unrealistic expectations of themselves and their children, they hit their offspring. They fall into coping roles, acting out the familiar and known as their own parents often did.

## Wendy and the Group: A Case Study

The mothers' group is largely made up of Maori and Pacific Island women. Details have been changed to preserve their anonymity. Wendy was raised by her grandparents. Recent events have resulted in strained relationships between herself and her family. Wendy is a quiet observer and active contributor in the group. She has shared a great deal about herself and her family circumstances.

Wendy does not currently parent her daughter and son, who live with two other families. She has a gentle and loving relationship with her younger son, but her relationship with her daughter, Linda, is difficult. Linda, now a teenager, was parented by elders in the family in her formative years. This is the traditional custom in some Maori and Pacific Island families. Linda has re-entered her birth parents' family as a troubled youth and sexual abuse victim. Wendy, already in coping mode in a dysfunctional marital relationship, has turned to her uncle for help. She has asked him to look after Linda and granted him legal custody. However, he too is unable to manage Linda's rebellious behaviour and passes responsibility for her on to extended family members. These caregivers manage Linda's behaviour by allowing her to do as she wishes.

Wendy chose to participate in the mothers' group as part of a journey to regain legal custody of her two children. She wants to be a *loving supportive mother, wise guide and gentle but firm boundary setter*. Wendy and Linda recently spent a weekend together after some time apart, and it did not go well. Wendy meets the challenge of Linda's unacceptable behaviour by becoming a *strict disciplinarian and rigid boundary setter*. She has expressed concern about another planned weekend with Linda. She does not want to recreate the antagonistic relationship of the previous weekend.

## A Psychodramatist's Lens

Thinking as a psychodramatist I warm up to investigating Wendy's family system, the roles that she has developed, and the social atom repair that will be required. The

following vignette illustrates how I worked with this client psychodramatically, focusing on exploration and social atom repair.

I begin by warming Wendy up to the scene and her family. I invite her to place herself in her family home and to choose a room in which to meet with family members. When she chooses the lounge I take particular care setting the scene, attending closely to Wendy's warm up. I think about what Wendy has expressed in the group, her relationship with those who raised her and her current relationship with her uncle and extended family.

I encourage Wendy to examine the walls and take note of the pictures that are placed there. She describes pictures of her paternal grandparents and great aunt who raised her after her grandmother died. I direct Wendy to take up the roles of each person and interview her in each role. These people provided her with unconditional love, and passed on to Wendy their values and knowledge of her heritage. When Wendy takes up the role of Grandmother, she looks lovingly towards Wendy and expresses regret that she is not there to help her now. She is sad that her son, Wendy's uncle, has held on to his perceived hurts and wrongs after all these years. Wendy takes up the role of Grandfather and we discover that he is also loving and supportive of Wendy.

Through role reversal, we discover Grandmother's and Great Aunt's regrets. These are focused on a time in Wendy's youth when she was accused of wrongdoing by her uncle. Although they did not believe the accusations, at the time they went along with Wendy's uncle. I maintain Wendy's warm up through rapid role reversal. Using surplus reality, I encourage her to fully express herself and the distress that she feels about the injustice. Next, Wendy takes up the roles of her siblings. We meet a brother and a sister and both express support. They position themselves close to her on the stage. They have witnessed family events that they consider have been misrepresented, and express a willingness to attend court hearings to testify on Wendy's behalf.

Now Wendy enacts the role of her uncle. During the interview he presents himself as highly conserved, a *strict disciplinarian* and *religious, authoritarian controller*. He holds the view that Wendy is a spoilt brat and a gambling addict. He refuses to accept his nephew-in-law's confession that it was him and not Wendy who had behaved irresponsibly. His rigid beliefs appear to be influenced by experiences of injustice instigated by his parents. Furthermore, based on information provided by Linda's current caregivers, he believes that Wendy is a poor mother who has mistreated her daughter. While caring for Linda he has asked the church to pray for her and believes that the prayers will heal Linda. He refuses to address the issue of sexual abuse and has sent his great-niece to stay with others in the extended family, as he is also unable to manage her acting out behaviour. Wendy expresses painful feelings to him regarding his active engagement in what she believes are his attempts to poison the relationship between herself and her daughter. In role reversal, Wendy as her uncle refuses to engage and walks away, tight-lipped and angry.

At this point, I think about the unresolved conflict and the unexpressed hurt that lies between Wendy's uncle and his parents, and see this as a possible future scene.

### ***A Role Trainer's Lens***

As I warm myself up to thinking as a role trainer, I analyse Wendy's role system. Which

roles are adequate or progressive, how would I name her coping roles and where is the moment of conflict that causes fragmentation? I consider what is required to assist her to strengthen progressive roles and thus increase spontaneity. The following vignette, produced during a different session, follows on from the previous drama.

Based on my analysis that social atom repair was crucial to the development of Wendy's progressive role system, I began with a role training focus and then moved into social atom repair. I had, as always in a non-therapeutic environment such as the workplace, renegotiated the contract with the protagonist. The protagonist and the group must agree and be prepared for the level of exposure that social atom work requires. We had agreed that Wendy's role training session would focus on her maintaining her desired role of *loving and nurturing guide* while with her daughter Linda, rather than warming herself up to her usual coping role *Attila the Hun*.

As we set the scene together, I am motivated to assist Wendy to warm up to herself and her daughter. She creates a motel room where she intends to stay with Linda, and warms up to her purpose for being there. I notice that her body appears to be tense and restricted. I encourage her to walk around the room and give expression to her experience. As she walks, Wendy begins to free herself up. In a parallel process, I notice that my body is also relaxing in response to her increasing ease. She expresses her fears that she will attempt to control Linda yet again, and her desire to be supportive.

I ask "Who is here?" Wendy chooses auxiliaries to take up the roles of her son and daughter. She positions them with her son standing between herself and Linda. I coach her to notice what she has done. Wendy rearranges the auxiliaries, this time placing herself between her daughter and son. As I direct, I am observing Wendy's warm up, and I produce role reversals at warm up peaks. I am watching for the moment of internal conflict, when Wendy is unable to maintain herself as the *loving and nurturing guide* and *Attila the Hun* emerges.

At this point, I interview Wendy about her experience. I invite other participants to act as mirrors to provide Wendy with an opportunity to observe herself in the interaction. I invite group members to name Wendy's progressive functioning, and the coping and conflicted elements. My intention is to increase Wendy's awareness of her experience and the group member's awareness of their functioning. I note that the auxiliaries are not sophisticated in the use of this method and require a little coaching in the process.

Wendy now takes up Linda's role. Following the role training format, I invite the audience members to model alternative roles. I encourage them, as mothers, to experiment, to be outrageous and to play with different ways of relating to Linda. I am prepared to invite the protagonist to observe, if I consider that the intensity of her experience as Linda threatens to overwhelm her. The group members take up the challenge, some more than once, as they warm up and their spontaneity increases. Wendy expresses her enjoyment of the modelling and, based on what she has observed, experiments with new ways of behaving with Linda. Wendy practises, becoming soft and gentle with her daughter. When Linda expresses the desire to go to the bar for a drink, Wendy is able to say no and acknowledge Linda's frustration when the boundary is held firm. The relationship begins to develop as one of mutual respect.

### *A Sociodramatist's Lens*

As a sociodramatist, I think about Wendy's family and the world in which she lives as a social system. I think about how it relates to the work of this group. I think about some of the family systems that other group members have presented, and their warm up to their own functioning. Between them, these women hold much wisdom about the needs children have for integration into a family. I know that most mothers want to be warm and friendly towards their children, rather than turn into *Attila the Hun* or a *screaming banshee*.

I invite the group members to think about situations where new members are joining a family. I say "What is required to assist a new member to integrate into the family?" The issues are named and we begin to create a scenario of a universal family. As director, I remind myself that the questions are always framed with the collective in mind. For instance "What happens to children when they are abruptly moved from one family to another and their need for security is disrupted?" Or "How do you help children manage the grief that they experience when they lose a parent or loved one?" Or "What happens to children when they feel displaced through attention being given to a perceived interloper?"

I invite participants to take up and give voice to the various roles in this social system. The stage is populated with a newborn baby, older siblings who feel they have been replaced by younger siblings, a favourite child, and younger siblings and their relationships with an older child who is raised in another family. There are fathers who have to contend with increased responsibilities, wives whose attention must be shared many ways, and mothers who are struggling to manage the demands of increased domestic work. Parents, who have given away eldest children to grandparents to be raised as is often the Maori and Pacific custom, are also represented along with the eldest children themselves. Via role reversal, the participants in this sociodrama have opportunities to experience many of the roles and through this gain a range of different perspectives and insights.

From the discussion that follows, it is apparent that group members have experienced heightened awareness of the larger social system, and wider perspectives of the issues involved. A sociodramatist seeks this result.

### *A Sociometrist's Lens*

Sociometry is an instrument for measuring the relationships between individuals and in groups. I now employ this method to promote the work of this group. I invite the participants to explore their original social atom. Using Anne Hale's (1998) three concentric rings process, they map out the relationships using physical proximity as a measure, and identify the positive, negative (conflicted) and neutral relationships. In another session, I use the same process to assist the group members to explore current family systems. These activities assist Wendy to take the next step in her development.

I invite Wendy to set out her mapped family system on the stage as a sociogram. She does this, and then begins to explore the quality of the relationships in the system. Through role reversal, Wendy gains many insights regarding the complex set of relationships amongst her birth parents and their parents, stepparents, aunts and uncles, siblings and grandparents. Their stories emerge and come into conscious understanding. Wendy explores her current family system in the same way. She becomes conscious of

the repetitive patterns of estrangement, unresolved resentments, conflict and grief that have been repeated through many generations. The sharing phase reveals that other group members have been reflecting on their own circumstances, and have experienced many useful insights into previously unacknowledged difficulties.

## The Four Lenses in Summary

This table summarises the differences and similarities of the four lenses.

Lens	Roles	Issues	Thoughts and Feelings	Situations and Scenes	Modality
<i>Psychodrama</i>	private personal	personal problems social atom repair of inner child	deep emotions both conscious and unconscious	real situations past, present, future self-revelatory	therapeutic can be group or individual
<i>Role Training</i>	roles thoughts feelings and actions	private current behaviours	deep emotions both conscious and unconscious progressive, coping and conflicted emotions	interactive past, present and future	educational and therapeutic useful in organisations and with individuals
<i>Sociodrama</i>	collective social roles	collective hypothetical	deep emotions	less self-revelatory	educational directs attention to human growth useful in organisations and groups
<i>Sociometry</i>	private made public	collective private	light to deep emotional experience	revelatory	educative useful in organisations for groups and individuals

Adapted from Sternberg & Garcia, 1989:6-7

## Four Lenses But One Integrative Approach

Regardless of which lens I use to explore the issues that are presented, I know that there are five instruments to be used. These are the stage, the subject (protagonist), the director, the auxiliaries and the audience (Moreno, 1953). I also think about the three

principal stages of a psychodrama, the warm up, the enactment and the sharing and a possible fourth stage of analysis (Dayton, 1994). I may use the full range of techniques, such as concretisation, maximisation, sculpture, soliloquy, aside, doubling, mirroring, empty chair, time regression, future projections, coaching and surplus reality, in various stages. These techniques are shared by all lenses.

With all four lenses, I make good use of the audience members and know that they will assist me in the production of the drama. Auxiliaries too work for the producer - director by holding a role required by the protagonist, enacting a protagonist's perception of the person being portrayed, exploring an interaction, role reversing, understanding the inner world of the protagonist, and by providing contact with real people rather than imagined people (Dayton, 1994).

Whichever lens I am looking through, I believe that the group interaction is as valuable as the drama because group members act as mirrors and doubles for one another. In this way, it is as much a therapeutic context as the stage. Group members learn through the relationships in which they are involved. "The group becomes a hall of mirrors reflecting, amplifying, and distorting the members' images of themselves" (Barnes, Ernst & Hyde, 1999:110). At the end of an enactment, my job is to facilitate the sharing. Audience members express their feelings and reflections to the protagonist. They share what they have learned regarding their own personal story. In this way, the protagonist is supported to reintegrate into the group.

Whether role playing, role taking or in role reversal, the individual is learning to develop new thinking and feeling, and is experimenting with the responses of others (Moreno, 1953). Using all four lenses, I think about the level of spontaneity present and the individual's capacity to develop new thinking, feeling and acting. My role is to produce a satisfactory experience for the protagonist and the group.

## Conclusion

In my development as a director, producer and role trainer, I seek to develop clarity regarding the way that I work. I am thoughtful about what will create an environment that is artistically satisfying and helpful for all concerned. I am sometimes limited by my history and imagination. But as I continue to experiment with what is possible, I am inspired to grow and expand my flexibility and a repertoire of progressive roles. I am hopeful that as my inspiration and vision develops, so will the inspiration and vision of the people with whom I work.

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