



*Social Work, Sociometry, and Psychodrama:
Experiential Approaches for Group Therapists,
Community Leaders, and Social Workers
(Psychodrama in Counselling, Coaching and
Education Book 1)*
By Scott Giacomucci
Springer Nature Singapore
2021

Reviewed by Simon Gurnsey

Dr Scott Giacomucci has written a thoughtful work on the use of psychodrama, sociometry and group work in the field of social work and social work training. Giacomucci has generously made the book available as an open access book through a Creative Commons License. I read the Amazon Kindle version. Giacomucci's generosity in making available a 'free' eTextbook version of a psychodrama text isn't common, for example, Kindle versions of John Nolte's two very good books on psychodrama cost around USD \$45. The Kindle version of Psychodrama and Social Work I read had a number of content errors, I found these irritating. Sending content error messages to Amazon is possible, but I understand this causes problems for authors so I don't use their reporting system anymore.

Giacomucci is an academic with a Doctorate in Clinical Social Work and the director and founder of the Phoenix Center for Experiential Trauma Therapy. His primary interest is in using experiential therapy, sociometry, and psychodrama with trauma and addiction using a social work framework. In this book, he makes a compelling case for the clinical use of psychodrama and sociometry within the field of social work. He has previously written extensively about the use of psychodrama in clinical social work and you may have read some of the articles he has published in the Journal of Psychodrama, Sociometry, and Group Psychotherapy of which he is Co-Editor-in-Chief.

Giacomucci wants psychodramatic training for social workers to enable them to work therapeutically with groups and individuals. He strongly advocates for this training and offers many lectures and demonstrations of the use of different Morenian techniques, including on YouTube. In my experience some of the work displayed in these videos is a little pedestrian but nevertheless is a great introduction to a naive audience. People following his step by step guides, who are able to be satisfied with the limited warm up created, won't find themselves in any difficulty. In my view, psychodrama training has to be done in person

through experiential workshops and supervision so learning psychodrama from Youtube, Zoom and textbooks is, ultimately, extremely limited.

In his foreword to Giacomucci's book, Dale Richard Buchanan lets us know about his experience of the author '...[Giacomucci]... has developed his gifts of intellect, courage, curiosity, and charisma into talents that he has faithfully and consistently used on behalf of the isolated, forgotten, marginalised, and oppressed. He has boundless affection, love, and fealty to the family of humans and not just for the family of his birth.' Giacomucci's love for humanity shines throughout the book and his good-hearted, earnest approach carried me through some of the repetitive bits, to the gems.

The individual sections and chapters stand alone and can be read separately, however, the book builds into a comprehensive whole. Giacomucci himself cautions us against a piecemeal approach that might further perpetuate the separation of the Morenian method from its underlying theory and philosophy. There are chapters on, amongst other things; What Are Sociometry and Psychodrama?, Social Work with Groups, Moreno's Methods and Group Work's Increased Demand in Practice. He examines applications that have arisen directly from psychodrama like sociodrama, as well as gives brief descriptions of approaches that are related to psychodrama and have varying degrees of overlap like drama therapy, Playback Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed and Gestalt. Another section focuses on one-on-one work using sociometric and psychodramatic techniques. Having these approaches contextually described gives a satisfyingly complete view of Moreno's work and its impact.

The reach of Morenian into the modern day social workers' repertoire is highlighted. Giacomucci claims social workers '... regularly employ the sociogram, social atom, and role atom tests as non-pathologising assessment tools that emphasise our person-in-environment perspective.' There are strong crossovers between these Social Work applications and how I see psychodrama trained people in Australasia applying the method.

There is a section on Strengths Based social work and its parallel to psychodrama's mutual aid, group-as-a-whole philosophy and the notion of each person being their own creative genius, having an "autonomous healing centre" — the innate capacity to heal one's self (Moreno, 2012). That Psychodrama is inherently a strengths-based approach is, I suppose, obvious but hadn't occurred to me before and I liked having this parallel well-argued by someone so knowledgeable in both fields. Giacomucci's very complete references are a monument to an astounding breadth of background reading and research and are a great resource for students and researchers of the method.

I find myself recommending the book to trainees and others looking for a starter book on psychodrama that is complete and also has a free version.

However, I have some reservations. Giacomucci's thorough, 'leave no stone unturned' and academic style isn't for everyone. A colleague was putting off reading the book as they considered the possible resulting indigestion. More inspiring books on psychodrama are available. I wish *The Passionate Technique* by Antony Williams was still in print! Considering the academic background of the author and its potential audience (social work students) this style is entirely forgivable.

A more serious reservation is the section on role theory. It lacks any mention of the developments in role theory beyond the USA since Moreno's death. Moreno himself told us that role is 'the functioning form the individual assumes in the specific moment [...the person...] reacts to a specific situation in which other persons or objects are involved' (Moreno, 1964, p. iv). So how does the word 'specific' get overlooked by Giacomucci when a role analysis is constructed and we get generalised, un-contextual role descriptions like *Appropriate Authority*? Not including Max Clayton's developments in role theory (Clayton, 1993, 1994), undermines the theoretical basis for this section on roles. Clayton built on the work of Karen Horney (Horney, 1972) and Lynette Clayton (Clayton, 1982), and together they introduced us to ideas about roles being overdeveloped, underdeveloped, adequate, embryonic and conflicted and the descriptive role gestalts of progressive, coping and fragmenting. This theory has been built further by many articles in this Journal (Consedine, 2001; Crane, 2003; Turner, 2008; Reekie, 2009; Broom 2010; Thomson 2014) and referenced by Sociometrist Ann E. Hale in her article in *Group* (Hale, 2009), thereby creating a body of literature around role theory that supports a sophisticated and nuanced understanding and method of application that is widely used.

Impossible to miss, you might have thought, but this well-developed body of knowledge appears to be either unknown to the author or he has ignored it. Giacomucci, commenting on an early draft of this review, let me know that this apparent gap in his conceptualisation of role is because his understanding of role theory is based on the *Therapeutic Spiral Model* (TSM™) model. He considers that Max Clayton is unknown in the USA.

I can easily understand how the TSM™ 'clinical maps' and 'intrapsychic role atoms' (Therapeutic Spiral International, n.d) might appeal to Giacomucci as a Social Work Clinician. TSM™ also uses terms such as 'prescribed roles' that appear to subvert the nature of roles being 'specific' (Moreno, 1964, p. iv), contextual and relational (Williams, 1989). If the systemic nature of a role, as defined by Moreno and Williams, is conditional on a specific context and a response in a specific moment, then how can there be roles that are common to a group of people (prescribed) as TSM™ would have it, with Giacomucci's implicit agreement? Giacomucci compounds this gap in understanding of Morenian role theory by representing a Cultural Atom as a system of, what Moreno termed, Social

Roles (eg, teacher-student, parent-child), rather than the more evocative and situational Psychodramatic Roles that bring you right into the moment, for example *powerful raging dinosaur — distraught protector* (Crane, 2003). I suggest practitioners and students of psychodrama read these sections on roles as a way of contrasting and comparing the practice of psychodrama in Australasia with its USA counterpart.

Giacomucci's loving final words about Moreno see him as the embodiment of a social worker. 'He worked with oppressed and marginalised communities, groups, and individuals while creating larger societal changes which have had a lasting impact on society, education, group therapy, and social work. For this, we recognise him as a pioneer of the social work field and honour him on the 100th anniversary of his death.' (Giacomucci, 2021:687). And, yes, I almost got caught thinking there was a further content error before being reminded by Giacomucci via email that the final chapter is a psychodramatic letter from a social work leader in the future (2074) reflecting back on Moreno's contributions to the field on the 100th anniversary of his death.

This book is available in hardcover, paperback, PDF and eBook (EPUB) versions from the publisher. Springer <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-33-6342-7> and as a PDF from OPAEN <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/47303>

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Simon Gurnsey, having spent most of his life in Christchurch, now lives on hillside near Parua Bay, Northland with his wife Sara in the house they built together. They are companioned by their many chickens, llamas, dogs and cats. He accredited as a Sociometrist in 2015 after being involved in psychodrama in Aotearoa and Australia since 1988 and is now the AANZPA Inc. Treasurer and a TEP in Training working mainly in Christchurch.