

AANZPA JOURNAL #33 2024



AANZPA Journal #33 2024

Editor: Diana Jones

Editorial Team: Bona Anna, Sara Crane, Phil Carter, Chris Hosking, and Patricia O'Rourke.

Editorial Companions: each writer chooses a writer companion who focuses not on the writer's development as a supervisor would do, more, as Bev Hosking advised, their focus on the development of the writing. Sara Crane, Phil Carter, Charmaine McVea, Viv Thomson, and Chris Hosking were generous companions alongside writers for this edition.

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The AANZPA Journal is published by the Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association (AANZPA). It has been established to assist the fulfilment of the purposes of AANZPA through the dissemination of quality written articles focused on psychodrama theory and methods and their application by practitioners in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The opinions and views expressed in articles and reviews are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the perspectives and recommendations of the journal editor or AANZPA.

The Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association (AANZPA) is an organisation of people trained in psychodrama theory and methods, and their application and developments in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The purposes of AANZPA include the establishment and promotion of the psychodrama method, the setting and maintenance of standards and the professional association of members. Ordinary members of the organisation are certificated as Psychodramatists, Sociodramatists, Sociometrists and Role Trainers, and as a Trainer, Educator, Practitioner (TEP). Members associate within geographical regions, through the AANZPA Journal and at annual conferences.

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Editorial

... te taukaea o te aroha ka mau ake tonu e¹ ...

The bonds of love and connection are forever bound. Our relationships and shared stories woven together, are deeply embedded in our future.

How does an editor decide what's in and what's out in their publications? For AANZPA's Journal I discovered that to emphasise the voice of the writer and retain accurate grammar, tenses and punctuation was one key. As another key for vibrant informative writing, I am restricting the use of the word 'it' and invite writers to include the subjects or objects 'it' replaces. This decision is influenced directly by my TEPit writing supervisor Joan Chappell-Mathias who would say "It? It? What is 'it'? You can put 'it' in a wheelbarrow and wheel 'it' around and you still wouldn't know what 'it' is!"

This newly minted editor sought guidance from earlier AANZPA Journal editors; Bona Anna, Chris Hosking, Sara Crane and Phil Carter who generously advised and shared their wisdom and experience. The AANZPA Journal's long-time designer Katy Yiakmis and Patricia O'Rourke helped me create a grammar and punctuation style guide for this and future editions.

What continues to draw my attention is the application of our method and its healing impact on individuals, groups, and communities. This edition reflects some of that work. Tina Roussos brings her work to life for us as she reveals how she assists older people recover their vitality after mental health crises.

After reading Leon Petchkovsky's thesis, Hamish Brown reflects on the impact of his work producing dream psychodramas and comes up with some fresh insights on differentiation.

Katherine Howard writes vividly of her experiences of role development in a conference workshop. Her article is eloquently accompanied by five authors who followed their differing warmups in the same workshop; Jean Merhtens, Bronwen Pelvin, Reitu Cassidy, Helen Close and Nikki McCoy.

Inspired by Moreno's work enthralling public groups, Cissy Rock wanted to experiment. She boldly ventured into producing public sociodramas and brings her insights and experience to us on these pages.

¹ From the waiata, *Te Taukaea o Te Aroha* written by Charisma Rangipunga and Paulette Tamati-Elliffe. Kāi Tahu (2011).

With over 25 years designing and leading workshops for women who have experienced sexual abuse, Marian Hammond lets us in on her work and the healing responses.

The short story *Jackson* by Carol Mattinson describes expansive community connections generated by a much-loved dog.

Increasingly there are poets in our midst. Woven through this AANZPA Journal are poems by Elizabeth Synnot, Philip Corbett and Carol Mattinson.

Phillip Corbett's poem *This goes with that* completely captured my imagination at AANZPA Conference 2024. So here it is again for your refreshment alongside what sparked his entry to the world of poets.

Sara Crane invites us into a rapid writing method where she brings her love of outdoors, animals and human drama with flash fiction. These are very short stories that can stand alone.

The insightful and sensitive review of Kevin Franklin's 2024 book, by his long-time colleague Elizabeth Synnot, enlightens us on scientific and social developments of sexual preference.

The final page includes a description of the front cover with nikki mccooy working on country. Depicted by artist Nancy.

Diana Jones
Editor

This goes with that

Phillip Corbett

You can't be happy if you've never felt sad
You can't be good if you've never been bad

You can't find peace if you've never been afraid
You can't get rich if you never got paid

You can't be honest if you never told a lie
You can't get an answer if you never asked why

You can't fall in love if you've never felt alone
You can't hang up till you've picked up the phone

You can't be a winner if you haven't thrown the dice
You can't be real if you're always so damn nice

You can't pull the trigger if you don't have a gun
You can't go to heaven if you've never had some fun

You can't start running till you stand up on your feet
You can't be a friend till you don't care who you meet

You can't be a hero if you've never run away
You can't find salvation if you don't know how to pray

You can't escape from prison if you haven't found the key
You can't be a sailor if you've never gone to sea

You can't be found if you haven't been lost
You can't get rich if you still count the cost

You can't reach the top if you've never hit rock bottom
You can't count your chickens if the fox already got 'em

You can't hear the music if you don't have time to listen
You can't find true love if a part of you is missin'

You can't find your spirit till you learn to just let go
You can't find true knowledge till you know you just don't know

You really learn a secret when you learn the truth in pain
If you think the world's gone crazy

Then it just proves you are sane!

The sea and the self — a poet's path to truth

I have been writing poetry since my mid-teens as a way of expressing my own inner observations and understandings of my life and the world around me and to investigate and describe what may be the hidden deeper truths that underlie the superficial appearances of things. My nature has always been one of deep enquiry and a sense of the mystical interconnection of all things. I grew up next to the sea in Newcastle and would wander along the beach alone on wintery days filled with the sense of power and vastness of the waves and the ocean before me. Years later I would return to the seaside for recuperation from a stressful time or in recovery from illness. I would swim out into the surf floating on my back feeling supported and suffused by the surrounding energy of the foamy seawater. I would repeat several times my own special invocation "Mother Sea, Mother Sea, heal me!" And you know, it always did, on all levels; physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

So poetry as a medium allows me to attempt to grasp and describe my experiences of the ungraspable and indescribable using such means as metaphor, simile and symbol. These can all contain diverse senses and meanings, often unique to each individual's own understanding. Such is the subjective nature of reality I believe. The Buddha is quoted as saying "The world rises and sets with the mind."

I regard psychodrama in many ways as a poetic method, all-inclusive in its content ranging from the concrete to the imaginary, surplus reality, always in the present but able to travel to the past and future, completely subjective to the protagonist's experience of living. The great gift of role reversal is that we can make the valiant attempt then as protagonists or auxiliaries to discover and better understand how the other experiences the world in their own unique way.

I recall fondly how Max Clayton used to say "What's the point of envying someone else's life? For all you know they may be going to hell in a handbasket!" In saying that, there is the clear sense that we almost always cannot know what the other person is truly experiencing in their own inner being unless we actually make the effort to reverse roles with them and then in that way, we may be able to fulfil as well as we can Max's other great loving dictum, "We can become companions to each other."

Max encouraged me to believe that it is possible to role reverse with anyone, no matter what! Such a huge step to actually allow oneself to attempt that. However, it reminded me of something my father, who was a font of wise sayings once quoted to me. This was the saying of a great early 20th century American physician and poet Oliver Wendell Holmes, who on seeing a condemned man being led to the gallows said, “There but for the grace of God go I!”. As I say in my poem “You can’t be a friend till you don’t care who you meet.”

I believe I could summarize the underlying message of my poem, consisting of fourteen rhyming couplets or aphorisms, as life has taught me that you can only learn about life by living it to the fullest extent: riding the highs and lows along the way as best you can, never giving up, trusting in the ultimate benevolence of fate, that in the end, one way or another, everything will be alright. But the seemingly unavoidable truth is that to get to heaven, self-realization or individuation as Jung called it first, you have to survive and learn from the trials and tribulations of hell, hubris or just plain stupidity!

As my good friend Christos Patty said to me recently, “Do you know what’s the antidote to Artificial Intelligence? Natural stupidity!”.



Phillip Corbett is from Newcastle, New South Wales and has a B.A. Honours in English, French and German literature, a Diploma of Education and a Bachelor of Applied Science in Chiropractic. He initially taught Special Education, Aboriginal Education and English as a second language in Sydney and Melbourne. He recently retired after working as a chiropractor for thirty-five years and lectured in the RMIT School of Chiropractic. Phillip has worked as a psychodramatist for ten years facilitating a group for people experiencing anxiety and depression. He was Chair of the Board of Directors at Little Yarra Steiner School where he also worked part time as a drama teacher, writing and directing student plays. He has performed as an actor up to semi-professional level for over 50 years. He translated and directed a German play at Northcote Amphitheatre and his original play *The Arsonist* was produced Off Broadway in New York in 2001. His favourite leisure activities include surfing, swimming, cycling, gardening, reading, watching movies, writing poetry and plays and getting together with his four children and six grandchildren.

Quiet joys amongst sad sad truths

Elizabeth Synnot

The breeze on my face delights
as does the warm sun on my knees.
The boy glances at me and our smiles spread.
Joyful moments poignantly experienced.

And, when the sound of birds has gone.
No colour to catch my eye.
There will not be enough
tears for such a sorrow.

Our ecology so disrupted.
And, for too long, unbearable terror and trenchant denial.
And then the surprise
that reality embodied can evoke a calm accord.

It does not matter to me, who shall survive.
When I die you will live.
And you may live, as I once did, in calm accord
amid quiet joys and sad sad truths.



Elizabeth Synnot lives on the Redcliffe Peninsula just north of Brisbane. Each month she meets with a 'climate' group called, What's on your mind? Over the group's two-year life it has become a place of sharing our current experience, thoughts, research, reading and our emotional journey. The group is open and meets in a community hall in Paddington, Brisbane.

Elizabeth is the group leader.

From being dumped by waves to finding shells on the beach: Rediscovering life after a mental health crisis in later life

Tina Roussos

Key words: anxiety, continuums, double, intervention, isolation, loneliness, mental health, Moreno, sociometry

There is a myth in the mental health field that medication is the only intervention option for older patients. The patients themselves often believe this myth. Depressed and anxious older people talk of reduced contact with friends and family, withdrawing into themselves, and being judged for not shaking off the illness. Experiencing significant losses of life partners and long friendships, and trying to cope with their mental illness, they often believe that at this time in their lives they are not going to be able to make new friendships and cannot look forward to positive experiences. I wanted to challenge this myth.

Moreno talks of the curse of social death:

As we grow older replacements of lost members in significant roles take place with greater difficulty; similar as repairs are difficult to our physical organism in the course of aging. An individual may begin to lose in the cohesion of his social atom for various reasons: loss of affection, replacement by another individual not as well suited, and death. It is probable that the minute shocks coming from social death experiences paves the way to premature aging, old sickness and physical death. Old people should learn not to give in to this curse, they should find friends, someone to love again.

Moreno, 1947, pp. 65-67

As a group therapist I delight to offer a new way of being, developing skills and imagination; new hope for a future that is otherwise shrinking. A sense of belonging enables respect, builds self-confidence and relationships are formed. A fear I had was working with strong personalities, keeping my boundaries in the face of people with entrenched ideas about their situations and experiences.

The Staying Well Group

I was invited to create a group program for older adults who had been discharged from a psychiatric hospital. I went on to develop and run the Staying Well program for over 12 years. I present here moments from this program, showing how group work, action sociometry and simple psychodrama interventions, produced a culture of kindness and warmth, allowing for playful exploration, the discovery of new friendships and the creation of new responses with people who had felt chronically stuck. Essential to the work, was my growing confidence in the capacity for spontaneity and creativity of myself and the group members, so that we became more adventurous together.

Developing and running the Staying Well program was a new role for me. It provided me a place to continue to learn and extend my experience, and it offered me a great team of colleagues to work with. I was excited that this was a way to further use my counselling and group work skills, and to bring psychodrama more into my work.

My purpose for the group was to reduce isolation. I wanted to create a group where patients could experience being heard, their illness was acknowledged and a learning environment was created; where new skills could be developed that would support recovery.

The Staying Well group was a process group, rather than skills-based. While a gentle educational component was structured into each session, including mindfulness practise, relaxation, simple exercise routines, and education about depression, anxiety and adjusting to life after loss; the focus was on group work and relating to the interests and concerns of the group.

The group was a full-day 20-week program, with an option to repeat the program once. It was the organisation's policy to aim for nine members in each group program. This policy is financially driven. In developing this program I was aware of the need to comply with health fund criteria, organisation policy and consider requests and suggestions from psychiatrists. I thought that seven members worked best for me to facilitate monthly bus trips for outings with picnic lunch provided in an eight-seater bus that I would drive. If I commenced with seven to nine members, it was a closed group. If I commenced with fewer people, the group remained open to new members until we had a full complement of nine group members.

The group members

The group was for people over 65-years old. Referrals came from the psychiatrists connected to the inpatient mental health unit, and every person referred had an assessment to review their suitability for the group. Frequently the group was part of discharge planning, offering support and

structure for those patients still in recovery. In the beginning, 80% of my group were patients I had nursed on the hospital ward.

Most group members had functioned well during their lives, having careers and raising families prior to the intrusion of their mental illness. Some were aware that they had functioned throughout their lives with a mental illness, though it now had become debilitating. Their mental illness was exacerbated by prolonged grief or difficulty transitioning to retirement.

When they joined the group, people presented with high anxiety, low mood, isolation, and lack of motivation to self-care. They typically reported poor sleep, low or no exercise, poor appetite, and substance misuse as a way of coping. They were all mobile and independent, with many using a walker or other means to mobilise and self-care onsite.

Building connections

My focus in the early stages of the group, or when a new person joined the group, was on building connections so that fear and anxiety reduced, and people were able to effectively participate.

Doubling a new group member as she enters the room for the first time

The group of five are very warmed up to each other; they have been working together for six weeks and today a new group member Heather, joins. Heather has major depression with chronic feelings of worthlessness. During her assessment she struggled to find words to describe how she was going or what she hoped to get out of group. She had high anxiety and avoided eye contact.

It is the beginning of the group session. The regular group members, Sam, Liz, Jane, Cath and Peter, take their seats around a large table in the room. They know exactly where they like to sit and chat as they settle into the meeting space. Heather stands just inside the doorway, her body appears stiff as she makes a tentative move into the room, then hesitates. She takes a breath and observes where the chairs are. She moves hesitantly over to the far side of the table, with her head down. The director moves towards Heather and stands beside her, in the position of a double. Heather looks up at the director and they have eye contact.

Director: (doubling Heather) *Where will I sit? I don't know where to sit. Is this spot someone's seat? I don't think I will fit in here, I'm nervous.*

Heather: (her body relaxes slightly) *Is this someone else's seat?*

Director: (warmly) *Heather this is your spot. Please take this seat.*

Heather smiles slightly, making warm eye-contact with the director, then sits down. Heather took up the prompt of the double to ask if anyone was

sitting here. The doubling seemed to settle and focus her in this first challenging moment, so that she could more easily join the group.

As the group progresses, sociometry is built through simple processes that acknowledge the here and now reality of group members

I found that action assisted the flow of dialogue between group members. They could first express themselves in action, and this assisted them to share more. Continuums became a simple intervention that people could readily participate in. The director begins the session making opening comments, welcoming group members and inviting them to speak. Heather's body appears to soften more, her shoulders relax slightly now that the attention is not on her. She appears to be listening, although she does not make eye contact with group members. She becomes more fidgety and appears to pull away from the group as the last group members speak, knowing it will soon be her turn.

Heather: (eyes looking down) *I don't have anything to say.*

Director: *That's fine.*

I pause, making eye contact. I wish to convey that here is a new member of our group, anxious and worthy of equal time but unable to speak at this point. I introduce the topic of the week, anxiety, and invite the group to join in an activity that may be unfamiliar to them. I describe the purpose as getting to know something about themselves and each other, telling a story through action.

Director: *During our 20 weeks together we will learn skills to help with anxiety. To begin with today, we are going to create a scale of your experience of the impact anxiety has on you right now. Stand and place yourself on a continuum. Please use your walking frame or walking stick. At one end against the wall on the left is the point where you place yourself if you have no anxiety (0/10), in the middle is mid-range anxiety, uncomfortable but manageable (5/10), the other side of the room is very high anxiety, awful and distressing (10/10).*

Sam: *Do you mean now? I was really anxious this morning when I left home.*

Director: *Yes, Sam, let's look at what's happening to you now. And yes, our anxiety does fluctuate a lot, even in the time in this group.*

Jane: *I'm not sure, how do I know?*

Director: *Jane, connect with your body. Is your belly feeling tight? What about your chest?*

Jane: (with a giggle) *Oh love, I don't like noticing what's going on for me.*
(she places herself on the continuum)

Peter moves slowly to the middle of the room along the imaginary line.

Peter: *Argh...getting out of this chair is an effort for me.*

Liz: (moves to position herself) *My anxiety is in between five and ten*
(giggles)

Liz and Heather look at each other, and Heather moves to be near Liz.

Heather: (speaking abruptly) *That's me!*

Liz and Heather smile at each other.

Aware that group members are warming up through being active, I decide to keep the movement going.

Director: *We will share about what you become aware of in a moment. For now, while you are standing, we will have a new criterion: loneliness. Loneliness is often spoken of as the silent intruder of the older person. We will create a loneliness scale. Over this past week show on this scale the impact of loneliness in your life. Beginning at this point I am not lonely; this is not something that impacts my life. The other end of this line represents those who experience extreme loneliness.*

The group move quickly to places on the continuum. This is an easy criterion for them to relate to, and they do not ask for further clarification.

Director: *Look around and notice where you have placed yourself. Are you alone? Do you have one or more companions on this continuum? How was it placing your experience on a graph?*

Heather and Jane are both at the extremely lonely end of the continuum.

Jane: *I never thought I would be on my own in my old age.*

Heather: *I don't live alone. I live with others in a residential care facility, but I am lonely.*

Heather speaks fluently and clearly; this is an important statement she makes here.

Director: (to the group) *How are you going?*

Group voices: *Good.*

Director: *Those with walking frames sit if you need to.*

Everyone remains standing.

Director: *The next criteria is pain. How much is pain interrupting your everyday life?*

There is quite a bit of energy expressed, mumbling as Peter and Liz move.

Peter: *This is where I shine. Pain stops me from doing most things.*

Liz: *I don't like it.*

I notice that there is an easy movement from Sam and Heather. Each know where to go on the continuum.

Sam: *Heather, you and I are here together.*

Heather: *I'm so glad I have strong legs.*

They laugh together; I am aware that mutual tele begins to build.

Director: *The last measurement is insomnia, or poor sleep. Place yourself on the scale from no problem sleeping to poor sleep.*

Director: *Take a seat. Now we will have a time of sharing. What did you become aware of about yourself, and what impact do you think looking at your vulnerabilities may have?*

Liz: *I really liked doing that.*

Peter: *For me it was another way to tell my story. I didn't feel judged.*

Jane: *I feel sad.*

Heather's head lifts, making eye contact as some speak.

Reflections

The purpose for me as group therapist, was to give voice to the physical and mental health concerns the group members struggled with in a way that was different to just talking about them. I use the continuums to assist movement from isolation with a symptom to inclusion in the group and acceptance of one's co-morbidities. A continuum produced gives a place for a statement to be expressed with no judgements or the experience of being shut down for complaining of a symptom. Common themes are identified. The impact of continuums for the group generally is a greater life expression. The movement reduces anxiety. There is group awareness and integration of membership with all involved in the exercise.

The impact of continuums on Heather's expression assisted her to build connections. Heather was very anxious and unable to speak when she joined the group; she was able to communicate with action. Before the continuum exercise, kind eye contact or a smile from a group member was overwhelming for her. After the exercise, she moved toward eye contact

when seated with those she connected with on the continuum. Heather could now receive the warmth being offered from the group.

Group members become auxiliaries to one another

After three to four weeks, I observed kindness and warmth grow. People greeted each other upon arrival and patterns became noticeable. The new group was forming, becoming oriented to the room, to me as group leader and to each other. On reflection they were so courageous. I witnessed them as they built relationships within the group and shared their light bulb moments of understanding. As group members settled into group and with each other, they became aware that they consisted of more than their deficits or symptoms. In an environment of acceptance their strengths and values became more evident.

When I took up my leadership and invited the group to move to find a partner, I considered the less mobile members and requested they stay seated whilst the more mobile members move around. I showed them how to face the chairs. The response was a lot of talking in pairs, deeper engagement was experienced. Talking in pairs reduced anxiety for some, developing moments for self-expression and learning listening skills. A friendliness and lighter atmosphere developed in the room. These group members had a shared belief that one loses friends as they age and finding friendship only happens when young. Now they were discovering something new. They were experiencing friendship. I could see the process of healing take place in the group.

The value of the warm-up phase in a group cannot be underestimated. The time for a group member to warm-up to themselves then to the group is of profound importance to the success of the group work. A good warm-up strengthens tele and can lead to social atom repair. Max Clayton (2004) says “we’re always working with the warm-up. We’re not just interested, in fact we’re not interested at all, in the end product. We’re interested in the protagonist developing a good warm-up. And they take that warm-up with them into the world afterwards”. I have learned that building tele with one another and with the therapist allows for deeper work to be explored.

At times, group members being auxiliaries to one another had an immediate positive impact

The group members are taking their seats at the beginning of the session.

Noella rushes to speak: *I was unwell when I woke up, I am not good.*

Director: *I’m really pleased you are here. What will help you to remain here with us today?*

Noella: *Sue has already helped me; she carried my cup of tea.*

Sue smiles and touches Noella’s shoulder.

Noella: *Just being here with everybody helps me.*

Sue: *I'm not sure what to do when I feel unwell some group mornings, but when I come to group, I always feel better when I go home.*

Noella: *Sue, I like you sitting next to me, I'm so pleased you have recovered well from your surgery.*

Noella is doubled by Sue. There is mutual positive tele between Noella and Sue; this relationship assists Sue to be a spontaneous double.

Later in the session ... Sue stands up to change position then sits again.

Cath stands and walks around. I observe her to be a bit agitated as if it was now urgent to move her body.

Cath: *I can't stand it, the back love, my bloody back!*

I validate Cath and Sue for making choices.

Director: *Cath and Sue, you both responded to pain. You both moved, stood up and shifted to ease your discomfort.*

I wanted to maximise what just occurred. I reviewed the options that I was thinking maybe Cath and Sue may have thought. (Doubling and adding some other responses that I thought might be present in the group).

Director (addressing the whole group) *As Cath and Sue sat, feeling their discomfort, thoughts probably passed in their mind. Here are some examples. Let me know if any of these thoughts ring true for you.*

I can get up and walk around to ease pain.

I think I will have to leave group and go home.

I cannot say anything, I must sit in my chair and let tears fall as I suffer in pain.

I can sit and get angry and agitated and think I can't do group. I won't come again.

Before I could add further to the options Noella spoke up, "that's me! I can't get up; I don't want to disrupt the group."

Noella then stood up. Her long-held belief was not to be a nuisance and do not disrupt; she must suffer in silence. These beliefs were getting in the way of accepting support from the group. Her option previously was not to attend group if she couldn't manage sitting through it, "I cannot be an inconvenience."

Noella became quiet and sat taking her gaze far away.

Director: *Sue and Cath, you both were auxiliaries, doubles for Noella. When you stood up responding to your back pain, this assisted Noella to stand up to ease her back pain.*

The life in the group is rich and full in this moment

Noella is beginning to experience that she has choices, and that in this group, when she makes a choice, she is encouraged and not considered 'an inconvenience'. The group had observed Noella's difficulties in walking independent of any aid. She had expressed that she could only use a walker when no one would see her, borrowing her husband's when she was at home.

In another moment in the group, I invite Peter to talk about his experience of using a walking frame, to share this with the group and as modelling for Noella. Noella came to group the following week with her own walking frame. She spoke of how when using the frame she had less pain.

Physical and other limitations can be challenged playfully through action

The focus for the session was on physical exercise. Peter, Noella and Jack made it known to me and the other group members that they don't do exercise. I invited them to come join the circle and modify the activity to their ability, with some movement. I was aware of the fear they held of creating increased pain, and a general dislike of exercise. I invited pairs to start by bouncing a ball to each other. The balls were bouncing everywhere and laughter erupted in the room. Peter, Noella and Jack were willingly involved and bouncing a ball and laughing.

As the group becomes more established deeper issues can be given attention

Max Clayton (1993, p. 87) asks two key questions that awaken me to the questions I wish to begin exploring within my group work: "Can we love ourselves to such a degree that we continue on in spite of feeling insignificant? Can we value ourselves in the midst of loneliness, aloneness and smallness?"

When I, as the group leader, can name an experience and raise a topic that may be taboo with family or friends, the group has an opportunity and a place for this. Sometimes one's shame or guilt gets in the way of talking about such topics as death, fear of the end of their life or the death of a spouse.

Generally, society makes assumptions about how people should respond after the death of a spouse and experiencing relief after a loss can be judged as wrong. One group member, Jane, had struggled with her husband having dementia and being in a care facility, and so when he died, she felt

conflicted. She is able to bring this out in the group, whereas in her family she has experienced being sharply dismissed.

Jane: *On Thursdays I can talk about anything and express my fears with no judgement. I feel guilty if I talk about my loneliness to my family.*

When group members are present in the room and experiences of life are shared, Jane becomes connected. She responds to the sensitivity given to her and she experiences positive tele flowing her way. In the group she experiences new roles and new functioning: she is welcomed as she arrives, her peers are interested in her and she feels heard. She participates in seated exercises; she is learning mindfulness, and much laughter is shared.

Life beyond the group room

Ultimately, the task is to make “home” a better place to go to, rather than the group the best place to stay in. Life in the social atom is often not as exciting or as close as it is in the group. The group itself becomes a major part of members’ social atom — that is the ethical and therapeutic trap of most groups... This two-way stretch of warming up a group enough for cohesion and creativity, at the same time as providing a frame whereby members (and directors) do not forget what they came for has been alluded to constantly.

Williams, 1991, p.177

Director: (speaking to the group) *I invite you all to think of the things you once enjoyed, and now no longer engage in this activity. Is there something you would like to get back to doing?*

Sam: *I liked going for walks along the beach. I can’t do it now. I would have to drive past the cemetery where my wife is buried. (Pauses). I miss her so much.*

Director: *Sam choose someone to be you from the group.*

Sam: *umm.... I choose Peter.*

Director: *Now Sam, you take up the role of being your wife Betty. Peter and all of us, we are supporting Sam here as witnesses to his dilemma.*

Director: *Hi Betty, what do you think of Sam no longer driving to the beach?*

Sam as Betty: *It’s stupid. Sam loves the beach. He would always talk to the fishermen, asking if the fish were biting, and if they would cook the fish up for dinner.*

Director: *Thanks Peter for assisting Sam.*

Director: *Now Sam be yourself. Sam, you have just heard from Betty about her thoughts on your beach walking. What do you make of all this?*

Sam: *She is right you know. It is a stupid thing in my head. I just thought I couldn't do things without my wife.*

The following week Sam shares with the group of his drive to the beach and enjoying a walk. Smiling as he said, "I did see a fisherman too."

A different approach to endings

After our 20 weeks, group members liked it so much that they did not want the program to end. Endings became a challenge for me as the group leader, just as they were for the group members. I questioned myself, whether I was now responsible for group members experiencing another loss; creating a place of belonging once a week, then announcing this too will end.

For the first couple of years leading the Staying Well group I had an awkwardness around endings. For some folk who chose to repeat the program, I worked with them for 40 weeks. The ending of the program still arrived unwanted. Navigating the sadness and anger from some group members about "why did the group have to end?", almost became a burden for me. I understood they had made new friendships and intimate details of their lives were shared, their question "where do we go from here?" was valid.

With the use of psychodrama techniques and sociometric connections I found new ways to end the group program. This process was life giving for me and each group member.

I now find endings easier. I am creative and spontaneous with group beginnings and endings. I can speak of what is in the room, name it and concretize it. I don't have to fix it or change it. I just bring an awareness to and acknowledge what is. By bringing a curiosity within the group about what has occurred in group from their experience of beginning the program and now the ending of the program.

Fear and anxiety are still present for some members when talking and planning toward the group ending. I can now give more time for the ending experience and hear their expression whether positive or negative of how they are going, thinking about the end of group.

When I look at my own experience of beginnings and ending with ease, I can assist the group to do the same.

In planning for the last day of the group, I request the members to bring along shells or stones that they may collect along the shoreline of the ocean or lake, or that they may have previously collected: one shell for each group member, representing their relationship with that person.

The group begins with open discussion about their fears and plans, recognising that today they are meeting here for the last time. I invite the group to give their collection one by one to the members, and as they give their gift, express what they value about the other person.

The collections vary greatly with Sam bringing very delicate little perfect shells. Peter has large shells from an around Australia trip a few years back. Liz has marked her shells with smiley faces. Rhonda begins tracing on paper her new gift shells and writing the name of the giver next to the tracing. There is much chatter, and great honouring of friendships made within the group. The group members begin talking about how precious the gifts are and the special spot they would be placed:

“I’m going to put these shells on my window sill in the kitchen.”

“I have an idea to place them around pot plants on my veranda.”

“These mementos are going on my desk.”

This ending was different. They were concretizing their relationships, new relationships formed during the group program. Honouring moments shared. The relationships will be remembered. I became aware there was a softening in me, an easiness. I felt less anxious and had a sense that this ending experience was adequate for group members on the day.

Conclusion

Much of Moreno’s work was aimed towards improving the situation of the isolated person. He highlights the value of group work; the individual has the potential to feel less isolated. Two processes happen concurrently in a group. There is the one-on-one relationship, who is sitting next to me; and at the same time each member becomes part of the whole, the group. What is learnt in the group can be taken and practiced at home.

The expectation in the health system is that group work with older people will maintain them in the community and at best reduce their admissions to hospital. Yet, the experience in the groups I run is that outcomes can be much more life giving.

One major focus of the work of the group leader is to pay attention to the transitions in the life of the group — the big step of a new member joining the group, and the difficulty of transitioning out of the group when the program is completed. Another major focus is to assist group members to become aware of old patterns, generate new possibilities, and develop new responses to changes in their lives. New roles can be experienced when fear and worry reduce. New relationships can flourish and the experience of living life in older age has value. Learning is possible within the later years or ending phase of life, debunking the idea that when you are older change does not occur with a good outcome. In the recovery phase following

a mental health crisis in later life there is an opportunity for a beginning to new roles and an ending to old ways of being.

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Psychodramatic production of dreams: Their relationship to symbolising and the process of differentiation in human development

Hamish Brown

Key words: differentiation, doubling, dreams, intrapsychic, matrix of all identity, meaning-making, original family, role reversal, spontaneity, symbolic elements, warm up

Over twenty years ago, in 2003, I read Leon Petchkovsky's psychodrama thesis (Petchkovsky, 1983), which I found inspiring. In it, he presents himself as a psychodramatist and Jungian analyst researching dreams in relation to psychodrama. When I reread his thesis this year, I realised I had adopted his recommended practice in the psychodramatic production of dreams without realising it. I have subsequently tested it out over the years.

This paper is written to draw attention to the psychodrama of dreams through Leon's eyes in 1983 and present in my practice as it is now in 2023. In this paper, I present the production of a dream using Leon's approach, in which some dream elements are maximised, and an emerging association to the original family system is produced. This paper draws attention to the practice of working with symbolic elements in psychodramas and their relationship to the stage of the matrix of all identity. I present work that highlights the movement from intrapsychic symbolic experience into role relationships and show how this is central to the production of many psychodramas.

Dream

A group member reports a dream during a group-centred warm-up in a workshop. She says: "I am in a hospital being met by two doctors who tell me I have cancer in my labia."

The person is then invited onto the stage to produce the dream.

Production

Two doctors sit on the stage next to each other in chairs across from the protagonist, who is lying down. Each person is interviewed briefly for role before the protagonist enacts each role as it happened in the dream.

The first doctor is a trainee, and the second is the lead. The lead doctor tells the protagonist she has cancer in her labia. The protagonist accepts this without apparent feeling.

The production of the dream is complete as it is, and we flow into the next phase of the production within the same scene.

Two auxiliaries are now chosen; one as the protagonist's labia and one as cancer. In an interview for role, the labia say "the meaning of my existence is pleasure." Cancer is interviewed for role and then says to the protagonist "I thrive by devouring you, then when you die, I die too."

In role reversal, the protagonist is reminded of her mother, who is chosen and stands behind the doctors. In the interview for role, the mother is ambivalent about her daughter and oriented to her own life's suffering. In response, the protagonist says she is willing to die because there is no pleasure in living.

Discussion of the dream production

Leon reminds us that Moreno's original approach to dream production begins with the protagonist going to bed and, while sleeping, remembering the dream and recounting it from start to finish. Then, the director produces the dream, and the protagonist returns to bed. Leon points out that accuracy is of central importance in dream production and that if this is done, it is possible to extend the production significantly. The production must be accurate so that the dream is not distorted. This means the auxiliaries must enact their roles in a manner that brings the dream to life precisely as it is, and the director must focus on accurately reproducing the dream before expanding the production.

The dream described above is brief, and care is taken to apply this notion of accuracy. The scene is set. This includes an interview for role with the protagonist in each role so that the auxiliaries are assisted to warm up. The dream is enacted fully from start to finish using role reversal. The protagonist expresses herself as the lead doctor, then the protagonist experiences this expression as herself and makes the response she made in the dream.

Symbolising and symbolism

The dream presents a symbol laden with the subjective meaning of the protagonist, central to the dream and not yet produced. Now that the dream has been enacted, the production can develop a felt experience of the meaning. It helps in my understanding to think of this in terms of the principles of warm-up and maximisation. The protagonist is directed to choose auxiliaries as her labia and her cancer. A brief interview is conducted with each element. Thus, the protagonist warms up to the experience and the motivation in each of the two elements of the symbol; these are

intrapsychic elements rather than roles. As she becomes herself again lying down, the protagonist has an association; she is reminded of her mother, and thus, a role relationship can be produced between her and her mother. This role relationship might be produced in a new scene as it relates to her relationship with her mother in her early life. Here, as we are producing a vignette, she places her mother on the stage, and a brief exchange is produced between her and her mother with role reversal.

This movement from the production of symbolic intrapsychic elements expressed in a dream into a role relationship is a product of the mobilisation of spontaneity as warm-up deepens. In terms of Moreno's developmental frame, when working with symbols, we are working at the stage of the matrix of all identity at the point of the split between fantasy and reality (Moreno, 1977). Essentially, felt experience expressed as a dream symbol comes into meaning in the protagonist's mind, language may be added, and a role relationship is remembered here.

I have noticed that this movement from intrapsychic experience into role relationships is central to the production of many psychodramas. Role relationships exist between people; however, people have intrapsychic experiences. For example, a person who experiences a critical voice that drives them in life often has no memory of the original social atom role relationships within which the experience developed. The production of the voice is not a role as it is an element of an intra-psychic experience; however, its production may lead to remembering whose voice it is, and thus, an original social atom scene can be set, including the original role relationships. Doubling may be needed as we are working at the stage of the matrix of all identity or, in the case of remembering a critical voice, the stage of the double. The protagonist's expanding awareness here results from the mobilisation of spontaneity brought about by using production and attending closely to the process of expression and deepening warm-up.

I discovered that this principle of accuracy is also true when producing an original social atom psychodrama. In my view, scenes in which ancient memories are brought to life on the stage must feel true to the protagonist's actual lived experience as it rests in their psyche. The mobilisation of spontaneity then follows as the protagonist brings their current awareness to life, assisted by the auxiliaries, the producer, and the method.

It is worth taking a closer look at this relationship between the representation of intrapsychic experience and the development of psychodramatic roles.

Discussion of symbolising and metaphor

Meaning-making can be understood through the human capacity for symbolising, which bridges fantasy and metaphor into felt experience and language.

One of the symptoms of alienation in the modern age is the widespread sense of meaninglessness... We can scarcely avoid the impression that people are experiencing the disrupting effects not only of an unsatisfactory childhood experience but also of an upheaval occasioned by a major cultural transition.

Edinger, 1972, p. 107

Symbol is a name given to personal subjective production of elements laden with meaning that, when placed together, connect us to a wider experience of our humanity. Our use of language is a symbolising function and is frequently assisted through doubling. It at once denotes collective meaning (words) discernible to others and simultaneously carries the personal subjective meaning that lives as feeling, images, memories and ideas in our experience. Thus, a symbol is comprised of elements connecting felt experience with language: personal and collective, felt and thought. Our meaning as a person is personal and communal; however, the process of differentiation involves each of us in bringing meaning into the personal experience of existing. One product of this is that the narratives that inform our experience are accurate not just for ourselves but also in relation to the system. This requires role reversal.

Suppose we understand dreaming as a process imbuing existence with meaning. In that case, it is essential for psychodramatists to treat dreaming subjectively and the whole being of the dreamer as paramount in meaning-making. The symbol integrates into awareness as its elements make a felt sense to the person to whom they belong, and this, in turn, changes the perceptions the person then has. While attention is often paid to the catharsis of integration towards the end of a psychodrama, this integration of elements in the early phases of a psychodrama is paramount in developing the awareness and perception necessary for new role development emerging later in a psychodrama.

Metaphor, including fairy tales, on the other hand, are collective and through which each person may locate themselves in a broader human context. If metaphor arises in the memory of a protagonist, then care must be taken in discerning the personal elements from the collective. For example, if a protagonist sets out to concretise the fairy grotto they played in as a child, then whether there is a fairy king and, if so, how he functions is known by the protagonist and cannot be known by the auxiliaries. Even though the experience of playing as children in fairy grottos is likely common among group members.

Discussion of differentiation

The term differentiation is helpful because it connotes the development of psychodramatic roles that are not present and, therefore, differentiated

from the role system of the original social atom. Awareness of the subjective or personal meaning of experience and its relationship to the original social atom experiences is essential in Moreno's notion of differentiation. We might also use the term liberated, which places emphasis on the system, and Jung uses the term individuated, which places emphasis on the individual. However, Moreno's term differentiated seems to emphasise both the process and the outcome.

This paper considers a person's development through dreaming and within the context of a person's original social atom. Moreno's emphasis on the relational nature of human development and differentiation, as outlined in his *Spontaneity Theory of Child Development*, was prescient in predicting the path of the development of psychotherapy as a relational practice over the next 100 years.

Moreno states:

The first universe ends when the infantile experience of a world in which everything is real begins to break up into fantasy and reality. Image-building develops rapidly, and the differentiation between real and imagined things begins to take form.

It appears that the infant goes, in his first universe, through two periods: the first period is the period of all-identity, in which all things, persons, and objects, including himself, are not differentiated as such but are experienced as one undivided manifold; the second period is the period of differentiated all-identity or of all-reality, in which objects, animals, persons, and finally himself have become differentiated. But there is no difference yet made between real and imagined, between animated and dead, between appearances of things (mirror images) and things as they really are.

The transition from the first to the second universe (that period when he becomes aware of reality and fantasy) brings about a total change in the sociodynamics in the universe of the infant.

Moreno, 1977, p. 68

Moreno is describing the period when a person's being creates the first psychodramatic roles by integrating fantasy with reality in the context of relationship and beginning to use language to symbolise one's experience to other people.

According to telic theory, the development of telic sensitivity is closely linked with the matrix of identity and the development of the cerebral cortex. As maternal figures and infant slowly grow apart and the identity pattern weakens, telic reciprocity steps in and operates as the residual function.

Telic reciprocity proposes that A and B are an interactional, co-operational unit, that they are two parts of the same process, although occasionally at different points in space and time. Telic sensitivity is, therefore, a two-way process, sensitivity of the parts “for one another”: it is by experience mutual and reciprocal, what benefits one benefits the other. It is productive because it is both ways and continuous.

Moreno, 1955, p. 276

Moreno is describing how the particular tele experience with maternal figures carries with it particular content that informs later development and lays the foundations for the development of the first psychodramatic roles. Social self-schema neurological research has established that there is an area of the brain that records the actual original social atom as it is experienced, and this area of the brain develops prior to the cerebral cortex. (Carter, 2014, pp. 45-59). The development of the cerebral cortex is associated with the development of language. These later scientific discoveries support Moreno's description of the stages of early development including the importance of early relationships in laying the foundations for the emergence of an experience of self.

In his paper *Role Theory and its Application in Clinical Practice* (1994), Clayton highlights the differentiation process in human development through the life span. In placing roles into gestalts of fragmenting, coping and progressive, he highlights that coping functioning develops as a progressive solution to overwhelming experiences in the original social atom that risk fragmentation. The creative genius involved in surviving these overwhelming experiences results in survival-based functioning, which he calls coping. The person develops the ability to cope, but in doing so, the roles developed are also restrictive, lacking vitality and freedom. As people address original social atom experiences that risk fragmentation later in life, they create new progressive solutions that were impossible in the original family system. Thus, as they address the lack of freedom, vitality, and adequacy they experience in living, they develop roles that are differentiated from the functioning of the original family system. These roles are categorised in the progressive gestalt because the solutions they express are not restrictive. Differentiation, or becoming who one most truly is, is a lifelong process because what a person perceives as restrictive evolves over time.

Max Clayton's frame for role development of fragmenting, coping and progressive is tremendously flexible because coping functioning can be developed at any point in a person's early life, from infancy onwards. This frame emphasises the development of what Moreno terms psychodramatic roles, which contain subjective meaning-making, and the spontaneity associated with vitality, relational adequacy and the capacity to generate

what one values in the world with other people. As such, doubling, mirroring, and role reversal are all relevant.

A psychodrama integrating elements in the development of a new psychodramatic role

I will describe a second psychodrama now to ground and make clearer the content introduced above.

Scene 1

The protagonist sets a scene that she describes as located in 'Fantasy Land'. She divides the stage into two halves with a long black cloth. In one area, she places a red cloth (fire) and a clock to represent her original family system. In the other area, she chooses an auxiliary to be her heart and an auxiliary to be her panther.

The heart and the panther express themselves to each other with role reversal, and it is evident they are in conflict. The heart describes the panther abandoning her to hurt and humiliation in her original family system as she sought connection. The panther describes the heart seeking love regardless of how she is treated, and she is frightened that the heart will do this again without awareness or consideration of the value of her love.

As the heart and the panther get to know and value each other, the conflict resolves. The heart commits to loving herself first and others in a manner that is not self-abandoning. The panther commits to using its awareness to protect her from annihilation. As they arrive in this new relationship, they agree to a union where they do not leave each other.

Scene 2

The group members are invited as 'her people' to a marriage between the heart and the panther. There is a depth of sharing from group members with this now integrated whole person (role). The protagonist warms up to herself at eighteen, and an auxiliary is chosen. A feeling exchange develops in which the protagonist promises never to leave her again.

Discussion of the psychodrama

From previous psychodramas, this protagonist knows that enacting the role relationships in her original family system will leave her fragmented, so she is seeking a way to feel unified, strong, and loving, differentiated from the role system present in her original social atom. One product of this work may be that she is able to enter into, experience and learn from the original family system without fragmenting.

In the matrix of all identity, everything is still possible. Each person's creative genius has not been narrowed down as a restrictive solution or response to the actual functioning of other people in the original social atom. However, it is also the time before there is a self, enacted as psychodramatic roles. The symbolic elements produced in this psychodrama are laden with the experiences of living and the possibility of becoming. They are also fragmented from each other as a result of the experiences in the original family system. Spontaneity is mobilized as a result of the production, and the protagonist integrates elements rich with lived experience and meaning into a new psychodramatic role. This is an example of Moreno's notion that the self emerges out of the matrix of all identity.

It is helpful to recognise that when psychodramatists are working at the stage of the matrix of all identity and the double, we are often resolving emotional fusions that can be experienced as all identity but also lack a differentiated identity. As each person differentiates through the course of their life, they come back to experiences of all identity, bringing with them a differentiated self — enacted as psychodramatic roles.

This is what David Schnarch terms self-validated intimacy. He provides a definition of differentiation that parallels Moreno's.

The capacity for intimacy is directly linked to the ability to tolerate existential loneliness and the relativity of one's perceptions. Differentiation is what permits an individual to participate in a system — whether a marriage, a family, or a society — without being captured by it.

Schnarch, 1991.

People's ability to balance humankind's two most fundamental drives: our desire for attachment and connection, on the one hand, and our desire to be an individual and direct the course of our own lives, on the other. The latter refers to the ability to hold on to yourself when important people in your life pressure you to conform. Differentiation yields emotional autonomy — the basis of healthy interdependence and the foundation for intimacy and stability in long-term relationships.

Schnarch, 2010.

The second scene in this psychodrama functions as a role test for the psychodramatic role emerging from the first scene. It is significant that the protagonist chooses the social matrix of the group as 'her people'. A group-centred warm-up is primarily a process of expressing and strengthening the telic relationships such that a healthy social matrix develops that supports the psychotherapeutic work of the group. In choosing the group as her people, the protagonist is expressing that the group is functioning as a

healthy social matrix for her such that she values and trusts the role test they will produce. This is an alternative social matrix to the matrix of the original family system. Moreno's description of tele above highlights that the telic experience of each person to each other are laden with feeling experience originating in the first relationship before the development of language.

Implications

Applying the principles expressed here has led to a refinement in the production of many psychodramas. My hope is that the content here enlivens your practice, too, and contributes to refining awareness of how psychodrama assists human development, including attending to the important developmental processes in the earliest parts of life.

Moreno's work is central to this paper and continues to provide a vital cannon that has remained relevant as psychotherapeutic theory has evolved over the last 100 years. This is of central importance as psychodramatists draw on our theory in supporting practice and affirm its relevance to the psychotherapeutic community.

Conclusion

I have drawn attention to valuing symbolising as a function of human development and as an expression of the mobilisation of spontaneity. I have drawn attention to its activation in doubling in dreams and in valuing symbolism and metaphor in psychodramas. This paper has emphasised differentiation as the central organising process in human development.

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The writer of wild soul

Katherine Howard

Key words: auxiliaries, coping roles, director, love, mutual, protagonist, roles, soul, trust, writing

“Now that’s the book I want to read!”. These words spoken by Geneen Marie Haugen at the “Writing the Wild Soul” workshop in November 2017 activated a sequence of roles in me over the following years.

Geneen is a well-known poet writer who lives on the west coast of America — she had come to Australia to run this 4-day residential workshop. Geneen spoke these words in response to my reading of a piece of writing I had completed in the workshop, “a Letter to my Beloved”.

Some participants were weeping when I completed my reading. I was puzzled. They were *emotional appreciators*. And when Geneen spoke, in her role as *enthusiastic coach*, I remember thinking: “oh, that’s nice.” I was a *bemused observer*. I was unable to connect with or accept what she had said, nor could I connect with the heartfelt responses of others.

Over dinner that night, some other participants asked me “how does it feel that Geneen said she wants to read your book?” I could feel envy coming my way. I could sense that I was meant to feel proud and excited.

I did not feel proud or excited. I wanted to reject and ignore their envy, to minimise my writing and make more of their written pieces. I recognise this response as an old role of the *fearful minimiser of self*. She who is afraid of the animosity of others that comes from standing out or being chosen by the teacher. Now, I understand this as a role response from my original social and cultural atom. A response to being born “too big” and making myself small to make others more comfortable.

The next day over a cup of tea, Geneen says more to me about my writing. None of which I remember. Except for “Writing seems to come easily to you.”

I have not written since she spoke the words “writing seems to come easily to you.”

The *pragmatic copier* has been active; she completes the daily writing requirements of a professional counsellor, makes social media posts and the shopping lists of life. The *writer of wild soul* has been dormant. She had become disempowered and waiting.

Fast forward to January 2024. I am in the workshop “Tasting Life Twice, a workshop for writers” led by Diana Jones and a large group of participants at the AANZPA Conference. As I finish telling the story of Geneen and writing the wild soul, I see a smiling director move towards me with a gleam of recognition in her eye and outstretched hand beckoning me to step onto the stage. In that moment, I recognise the strong mutual positive tele between the director and myself — tele that has developed over many years of periodic connection at AANZPA Conferences. This becomes a sense of trust and safety as I accept the invitation and proceed onto the stage.

The scene is set. I choose auxiliaries for my many writing accoutrements which concretise both my addiction to stationery and my avoidance of writing:

- A beautiful sturdy roll top desk
- A view of particular trees
- Thick creamy textured sheets of paper
- A collection of fountain pens. Two in particular, a scratchy nibbed one, which insists on being written.
- And one wooden pen, hand created in Ireland of deeply dark ancient knotty Bog Oak.

As these accoutrements are enacted by auxiliaries, I become aware of great pleasure in the physicality of these objects. I recognise that are all support roles to my warm-up to writing. I notice how I love to look at them and touch them. Perhaps even at times caress their textured surfaces.

On reflection now, I wonder if they truly are support roles to my warm-up for writing. Perhaps they might in truth be distractions/diversions from taking the action of actually writing. Nevertheless, they provide great pleasure, and I have enjoyed collecting them, convincing myself that they all assist in my warm-up, even though the evidence says otherwise: the page is blank, the ink is not flowing.

The scene is set. I ought to be ready to sit down and write.

But I am not. I am conflicted. I know that I can write. I love to write: if there is a reason, or a structure that has the purpose of writing.

A kind of malaise hits me. I have a physical sensation of resistance in my hands and in my gut. Many questions reel through my mind. What’s the purpose of writing? Is it a waste of time? Are there other more important practical things to get done? Who will want to read it anyway? Is it too personal? Will I embarrass myself? Or my family? Or my parents?

I recognise that my father is here on the stage. I chose an auxiliary.

Here is a beloved man of Irish sensibility and working-class background. He is very smart, my Da: a mathematics whiz and a hard worker. Born in the middle of eight children and always having lived in Government Housing

with not much money. He began work at 16 for the Sydney County Council as a clerk and retired in that same role with the same Council at 55. He has always been, and remains, a *fierce lover of family* and especially of my Mum. In my childhood, Da was the *stern disciplinarian* who was often absent because of working in multiple jobs (Council clerical work being poorly paid). He had strong ideas of the roles and responsibilities of a father as the provider of material supports.

As the first born of six siblings, I have always been certain of his love for me and for all of us. I was 10 when my youngest sister was born. With six young children in the house, I learnt to be independent and responsible.

My Da was proud of my intelligence and capabilities. However, he was emotionally unavailable, and I was far too busy reading books to care. Over the years, Da has always been proud. He has always stood with me and my siblings, even when we have done things that are less than pride inducing (even shameful). These days he expresses his love regularly and with ease: he says, “I love you” and I remain the responsible eldest. I am the one who organises 70th, 80th and 90th birthday surprises, the one who executes wills and powers of attorney.

In the drama, Da reminds me of several roles that I had and that he believes are still within me. In the moment, I recognise the truth of this. There is the small freckle faced curly haired girl who was deeply earnest and invested in the imaginal worlds. This small girl wrote all the time. She is such a *spontaneous creator* in her writing. An *intense and serious expresser*. This is a job she is deeply committed to.

Da reminds me that he keeps copies of my stories and writings that were regularly published in *The What* — that weekly newsletter of the Caringbah local public library. *The What* was printed from an inky machine with a revolving crank handle on porous various coloured blotting paper.

As I write here, I remember that as an eight-year-old I was deeply wounded by a comment from an editor of *The What* about my writing. The editor said that it was “very earnest and drawn out”. I was deeply offended. I also recognised that it could be true. My response was a measure of the depth and seriousness of my love for writing. I am an *intense and responsible expresser*, always.

An early love affair

My greatest love up until the age of 10, was the Caringbah Public Library and its crammed bookshelves smelling of musty paper and each book shining with plastic wrapping that was supposed to protect them from thoughtless handling. I still have an intense hatred for people who dog ear books or place drink cups on the cover or pristine page... why would you do that?

My library card was my most prized possession. I recall the day I discovered the library and carefully carried the card home for my mother to fill out. It would give me access to a whole world of magic and expanded reality — worlds I did not know, except by instinct. I was five years old. And then there was the pride and joy of seeing my own writing in print in *The What*, with its particular inky smell. Apparently my Da loved it too, as evidenced by his historical collection of *The What*. But only the ones I was published in.

Back in the drama

My Da reminds me of a cluster of roles that were and are still alive in me, our ancestral Irish thread. This is a role cluster he has carried from the ancestors and passed on to me — my white (paternal) thread; that thread that holds the struggle of survival and the poverty and deprivation of living with an overlord. He loves that I keep deeply investigating all these Irish ancestral roles, and that at various times I had recorded this in my letters to him.

As I reflect on the drama now, I see that my writing has given him joy and the depth of many understandings. It has expanded his life experience and knowledge of himself. And his proud knowledge of me: the writer. I understand now that this is the purpose of writing, not just for my Da, but for any reader. As a *writer of wild soul*, I recognise our purpose is to enact the roles of *perspective explorer* and *experience broadener*.

As the protagonist in this drama, I notice the white thread that is carried by my Da from many generations of Irish ancestors and given to me: “The only worthwhile achievements are those you work hard for because life is hard and survival, even just staying alive, is success.”

I recognise in this drama, that somewhere along the weaving that is my life, I have chosen to enact the coping roles in response to this white thread as a priority. The roles have become over-developed as the white thread’s message of the practical importance of survival has been inherited. This choice and its effect on my writing has not been conscious until now.

This has meant that my coping roles of the *hard worker*, the *committed achiever*, the *pragmatic responsible family member* have been in the forefront of my functioning. These roles have rejected and kept suppressed the *spontaneous creator* and the *earnest writer*: after all, what purpose do they serve in the commitment to survival? How can they be of value if they come easily?

It dawned on me that somewhere along the way I had lost touch with the pleasure, the ease, and the earnestness of that small girl who *wrote all the time* in her exercise book, and with a blue biro. Right now, I recall the Irish’ love of story and their valuing of the imaginal world. I am sure that is in my *white thread*, overlooked before, and yet the foundation of my writer of the wild soul.

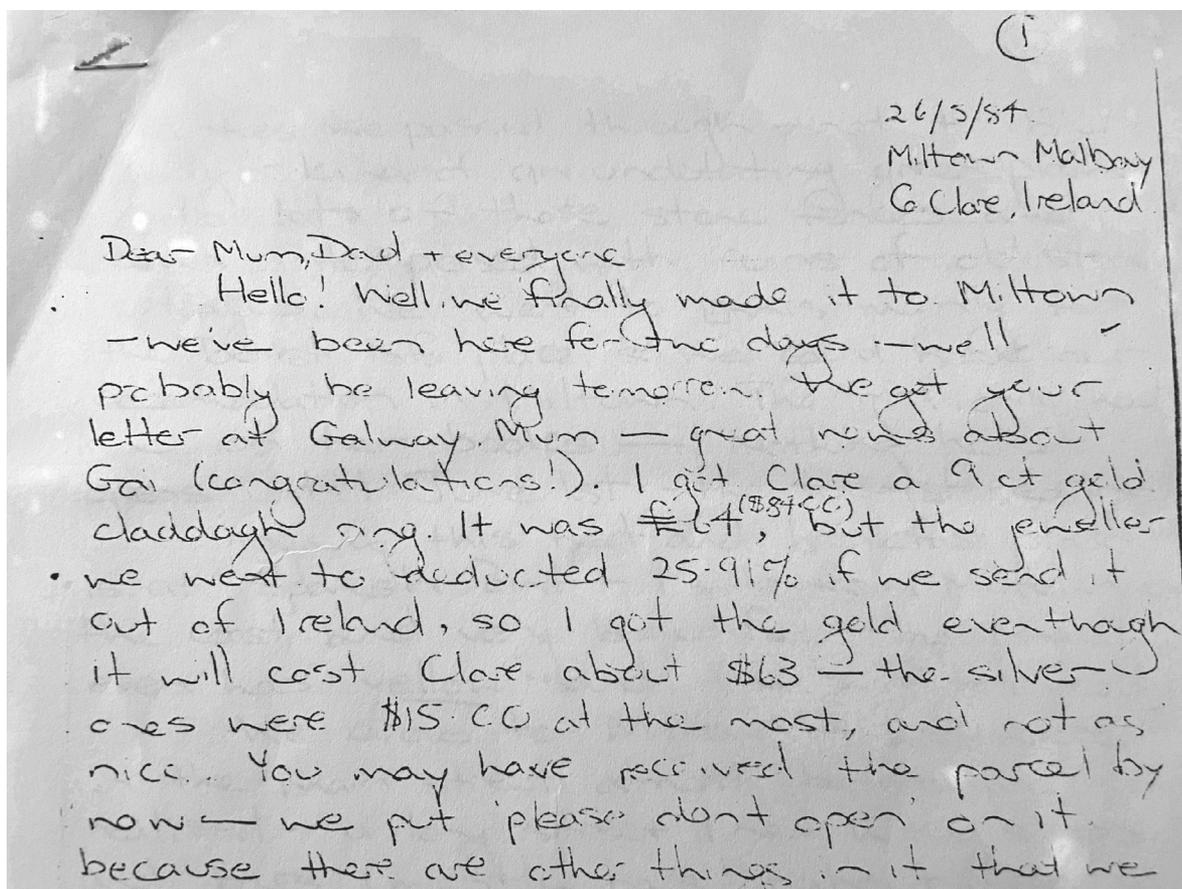
Does writing come easily to me?

I don't know if that is true. I do know it appears that some others might think so.

I am now in 2024 and have many social and psychodramatic roles: I am still a daughter, and a mother, grandmother and partner. I am a therapist and a teacher. I am a practitioner of psychodrama. I am finding her again — that small girl who just knows that she must write. I can smell the inky pages again and feel the shiny plastic book covers. I am creating a relationship with her determined certainty that life is more than survival. I am loving that she is an earnest explorer of the depth and breadth of life. The drama allows me to give life to her *dedicated recorder* in writing of the seen and the unseen.

Love letter

In the drama my Da reminds me of a many paged letter I wrote to him from Ireland on my first visit when I was 23 years old. Back then, letters were handwritten and posted. My Da had never visited the ancestral lands. In the



Love letter from Ireland, 1984

letter I told him of my search through the pages of handwritten Baptismal records at the catholic church in Miltown Malbay County Clare, and of finding his father (my grandfather) recorded there in those inky, textured pages.

I told him of the falling down tumbled stone fences which follow the ups and downs and ins and outs of the green landscape and hold nothing in/keep nothing out especially the rampant nettles and hawthorns. And the colour coded sheep with their variety of splotched colourful identification who always seem to prefer the grass and foliage on the side of the road rather than in the green fields. I write of finding and meeting the grave digger who knew where my great grandparents were buried in an unmarked grave. I discovered Tommy Kearney, an 87-year-old in 1984, long gone now, who had known my grandfather and his passion for football and that his nickname was “Didna”— because apparently, he was a know-it-all. (The apple does not fall far...)

My Da still keeps this letter, handwritten with blue biro on exercise book paper. He is 90 now, and I am 65. Da knows, and has always known, that I am a writer, and here I am; writing.

Reflections

I am reflecting on my journey to becoming a psychodramatist and the writing that was required. That in that process, my *hard worker* and *committed achiever* managed to have a cordial relationship with my *spontaneous creator* and *earnest writer*. It was a communal effort for a mutually satisfying purpose.

As a psychodrama practitioner, there are only rare experiences of being a protagonist in a drama and being directed. It is something of a relief for me to be able to express myself in a trusted group and be guided by a trusted director.

My years of directing dramas have given me a deep appreciation of my *spontaneous creator* and my ever-improving capacity to remain connected to her when I am directing. I am noticing that my hard work and earnestness are also required, and often undervalued by me.

Through my drama at the AANZPA Conference and this writing that has followed, I have understood that every role has value, a purpose, and a message. In my role development there is a core role. She is the *wisdom keeper* who understands the value in every role, supports and maintains the relationships between the roles and remains focused on mutuality. She is my inner director, my central organising role. She says that writing is a purpose in and of itself, and a true expression of spontaneity and creativity.

Magical writing by some of my fellow workshop people, read in the workshop, is included below.

Jean Mehrstens

Once upon a time yet to come, an idea was born in the form of a child.

There are no words at that time. The body speaks. Sounds emerge. This new path is creating itself from the paths that come before it.

From space, the paths are spiralling; back, and beyond.

Words come. Excitement grows.

Accumulated experiences, ideas, feelings, reflections, listenings, conversations, readings. Visions yearn for expression. Impulses. The inner and the outer impulses seek primacy — to remain silent or to express?

Who will decide?

Can all these words be allowed to exist?

The air is still.

Jean's reflections:

This just came out of the silence/experience/feeling. That space with all the people there/expressions, and the warm-up and surprised me.

It was similar to that feeling as a director/producer of not leading, rather following — somehow through me.

Bronwen Pelvin

I am in Chiselhurst in the Women's College at St Lucia campus of the University of Queensland. The room is cool. The group is in session. Diana Jones, the group leader, directs Katherine in a drama about her writing.

Katherine recognises that an author commenting that writing comes easily to her has stopped her writing. Her purpose is to start writing again.

Katherine sets out her desk, her many fountain pens — fine purple; broad-nibbed red; scratchy-nibbed blue; flowing green. The voice “You have to work hard. What you get easily is of lesser value” is concretised as her Da and reflects his Irish working-class values handed on from his Da and the Irish mob. Hard work and family survival.

Interactions between father and daughter bring out the love between the two: the pride Da feels in Katherine, the difference in their lives, Katherine's fear of losing her Da when he dies, Da's knowing that he lives on in Katherine and her siblings and, if she writes about him, he will live on even more.

Katherine concretises her joy and pride in herself and the positive response of others to her writing.

Bronwen's reflections:

This work enables me to be a flowing red fountain pen with a broad nib. I feel delighted to flow easily and generously and make my marks on the page as a record of me.

I become conscious of my father and the love we shared, and this builds me up.

I become aware of my desire to censor myself in my writing and the judgment of my own writing as I write.

I look out the window and see the dried-up flowers of the tree on the top of the canvas cover of the walkway. Writing is what is left behind.

Helen Close

Is it the legacy of my Irish heritage? A family culture — its beliefs, experiences, values?

My mother's belief system 'money doesn't grow on trees', 'you have to work hard to get ahead. Look at your father — from office boy to CEO'. 'You must get a qualification of some sort, so you can support yourself — if you need to,' code for, if your marriage falls apart. Wherever the source, these beliefs have not been helpful or life-giving for my creative expression.

Then this: 'Artists don't make good money', 'you have to be really exceptional to be an artist', 'Art is frivolous, a luxury, not the stuff that real, everyday life involves'.

So, taking on my immediate family's thinking, I went into the corporate world and stayed there for decades; all the time, yearning to express myself creatively.

A year with piano. I toyed with learning the guitar although I was unwilling to fully commit to my father's request 'to practise'. What did I think was 'enough' practise back then? I don't know. I do know that I took his 'deal' seriously, rather than focussing on having fun with the guitar.

I have dabbled over the years. A drawing class here, printmaking there, jewellery making, mosaics, and various musical instruments. A shallow dive into all these. Oh yes — and creative writing. I have needed to go to a class for weeks to fulfil my commitment to any of these.

I thought of enrolling in a Fine Arts course. Years ago, I went as far as enquiring about the Parson's School of Art and Design in New York City. I had no portfolio, just the guts to explore. "Yes," they said. "Apply". I didn't. My head said it would cost you one third of the money from the sale of your house at the time. My heart ached and remained silent.

What has been consistent is my singing. My choir, for the past eighteen years. I hum much of the time. People notice it and comment. Often, I am unaware that I'm humming. It just bubbles up out of me.

Percussion I love. I'm exploring it now. So many things can be used to make a rhythm.

Dancing I love. Am I doing it regularly? No. And I must source more dancing this year.

I realise that I have needed 'permission' to embrace (indulge in) creative expression.

I now give myself full permission to toe-dip; immerse, enjoy, and be filled up.

Nikki McCoy

Its freezing, windy, chattering bones

The long fences and churches stretch my heart

I belong here, I am loved here

Nothing else matters

And yet my heart hurts and yearns for words n paper and fancy pens

I ask myself

Can truth and love lay together

Yes my dear, Da Says

I trust you

I trust that love can ease me

You can let go.



Katherine Howard is a psychodramatist and mental health occupational therapist with a private practice in the Blue Mountains and Sydney. Combining her love of nature-based spirituality, feminism and psychodrama, and her knowledge and experience of the western medicine mental health systems, she has created and teaches a 2 year course called Shadow Cycles: Cyclical Wisdom for Mental Health. She is writing a book. For the grandchildren.



Jean Mehrtens is a psychodramatist and psychiatric nurse, particularly interested in clinical supervision. She is passionate about acting on climate change in collaboration with First Nations and sees the two “projects” as vitally linked. Jean enjoys making things with her hands — gardens, socks, food ... As a dual citizen Jean values the ways AANZPA lives in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia.



Bronwen Pelvin is a perennial psychodrama trainee who loves psychodrama and being part of the AANZPA community. She worked for 42 years in the midwifery workforce including being the Principal Maternity Services Advisor in the Ministry of Health. She is happily retired, living in Nelson, Aotearoa with Ali Watersong. After a time of transition and adjustment, she is now loving her no pressure, “doing what I choose” life.



Ko Reitu Cassidy tēnei.

He uri tēnei nō Te Tai Tokerau, Ngāi Takoto, Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi.

“He iti marangai te pāhukahuka, he iti pioke, nō Rangaunu, he au tōna”.

Reitu Cassidy is an advanced trainee in the Dunedin Campus. She is warming up to writing her thesis next year, with an idea of reflecting on the encounter and integration of te ao Māori and Psychodrama. This is what she does in her life. She activates tikanga and matauranga Māori to bring impactful and transformative outcomes.

Reitu holds many roles, as a Kairaranga, weaving for fun and for pleasure, mostly. She is a Kaikaranga, upholding a strong responsibility as wahine Māori. As Kaioranga Hauora Māori, she provides Māori intervention to whānau in mental health services and is Pou Ārahi, in supervision.



Helen Close enjoys facilitating processes of change for individuals and organizations. She has extensive experience in the corporate world, spanning more than thirty years, in consultation and facilitation, marketing, strategic planning, and consumer and social research. Now she is passionate about expanding her own and other's creative expression using psychodramatic and other methods.



Nikki McCoy is a psychodramatist who works in Mparntwe with Aboriginal people from many different cultural and language groups. She works as a trauma and addiction specialist in prison and post-prison release alongside people who have a strong desire for recovery. Nikki also runs a psychodrama group in prison for men who have significantly harmed others called Boss of Your Feelings.

When the cow jumped over the moon

Sara Crane

When she was much younger she wrote clichéd poems about the moon.

Now, she stands on the cold sand rubbing her ankles gritty with the soles of her feet. She hums tunelessly “will he won’t he, will he won’t he ...”. If there were daisies on the beach she’d be plucking off their petals. The stars push moth holes in the darkening sky. The moon’s not up yet.

Last week she saw him in the arcade when she was getting a double chocolate milkshake. Later he sat next to her at the bar and bought her a Babycham. She isn’t sure about meeting in the car park.

The waves are slack on the outgoing tide. A few unmated cormorants loiter and chortle. She slides backwards towards the rocks so she can be sure to see his headlight when he rides over the rise.

Suddenly the moon shows up. A highway of silver spills towards her and makes weak shadows on the shore.

She twirls her skimpy skirt like a ballerina. She dances and laughs. Twiddles patterns with her toes, reaches towards the full moon with outstretched arms and bathes in its filmy light.

When she hears the car she freezes. Catches voices she doesn’t recognise. Then he calls out. A crude expletive. They all laugh. Bottles bounce and break on the sea wall. The acrid smell of smoke reaches out.

She ducks down and runs through the dunes towards home by the back lane down by the railway track. She ignores the gravelly screeches of wheelies and bikes backfiring in the distance. Swinging her sandals she sings all the nursery rhymes she can remember.

She crosses the bridge and slowly pulls her sandals back on.

The moon disappears behind Cave Hill.

Of magpies, shags and burning

Sara Crane

There is a large magpie in the corner of a stubbled paddock. Watching.

The magpie caws. Smoke rises from the barn, and I have to decide whether to bark or not.

I don't.

The boy is young. He is the child who never listens and is never listened to. The magpie talks to him and he understands every word she says. He knows she is a she. When she nests he knows where she lays her eggs. He is on protection alert and he needs to be.

The magpie winks. I wink at the boy.

Together we trot through the mangroves to the estuary. There is an old eel resting under the jetty. We can smell the smoke and I imagine I can hear the sound of flames. The old eel winks and I wink back.

There is a little dinghy tucked up the bank. The boy and I look at each other, it surely wasn't there yesterday. We jump in and he starts to row us downstream. The shags holler greetings as we pass under the overhanging branches.

We can see black smoke. Really smell it now. I try not to growl. The boy pauses the oars. He lets the boat slide up against the bank and strokes my head. I let him know we can never go back.

The magpie flies close. She calls danger. The boy takes up the oars again and rows swiftly towards the beckoning sea. I stand in the bow.

Watching.

About writing Flash Fiction

The magic of very short stories, for me, is in the intensity that a brief piece of writing can capture. As a psychodramatist I love to play with my narrators and the characters in each story. Finding places and a congruent atmosphere is like setting the scene in a drama. The challenge of an imposed short word limit also makes completion manageable. I find it a very creative art form.

The writers group I belong to meets monthly at the library to share and refine our stories together. We organise workshops, produce anthologies and encourage young writers to participate. Some of us recently performed at the Whangarei Fringe Festival.

Simon Gurnsey and I also host regular soirees at our home where locals come to try out their stories, poems, songs and music and enjoy the stimulus of an intimate performance space. Sometimes the llamas come and listen too, and the cats and dogs are always keen.



Sara Crane is a Psychodramatist and Trainer Educator Practitioner. She lives and works from Parua Bay in Te Tai Tokerau. She also writes poetry, professional articles and loves reading just about anything.

I consulted with Cher Willisroft, a New Zealand sociodramatist and Trainer Educator Practitioner, whose report I had read in AANZPA in AGM minutes about her running Living Newspaper sessions in Nelson. I remembered reading about Moreno running public sessions he called the Living Newspapers where he worked with illiterate people, using drama to bring the news to life, and encouraging critical thinking. It was a simple yet radical idea. Cher said one sentence that I was captured by “If I was to do it again I would do it at a Fringe Festival”²

That’s the fizz — a show, an audience of everyday people affected by the method, going back into their families, communities, workplaces having experienced sociodrama and it having had an impact. I thought of all the ripples and felt excited about the possibilities.

Planning

Cher was most encouraging, offering guidance as to how such a show might be structured.

I called the show ‘We are the Drama’ with a tagline that the audience are the performers and the performers are the audience.

To register with Fringe, I needed to have:

A confirmed venue,

Dates and times the event would happen,

Set ticket prices,

A blurb to describe the event,

A good quality image for publicity and marketing.

The hardest part was finding a venue but becoming part of Fringe was a well-supported process with a humming hub of people willing to help make my idea a reality. I made my way through the forms ticking high audience interaction and had an illustration depicting a stage and newspapers. I also added a rider saying that, ‘nobody will be asked to do anything they don’t want to’.

The venue was found by Fringe, an art gallery turned performance space for the night. Visiting the venue, I could envision a large circle of chairs and 15 or so people warming up to an evening of Living Newspapers. The event would be a 75-minute session run on three consecutive nights with a little added pressure at the end of the session to clear the stage within 15 minutes before the stand-up comedian started her show after me.

² The New Zealand Fringe Festival is an open access festival, providing various platforms for artists to experiment, present, and show new or refined works around Aotearoa.



I had 100 words to entice, explain and sell tickets.

The event would be part performance, part entertainment, part social therapy. As the director I would be in charge of the event as a whole taking account of the range of warm ups and expectations. I made sure I was well planned.

Event

As people came into the session, I introduced myself to each group member. When we started the session, I joked about participation to break the tension and get people laughing. I reassured them they wouldn't have to do anything they didn't want to. I sensed participants' anxieties drop and followed with a simple activity. I asked everyone to be teachers attending a conference. I wanted people to experience 'being' rather than 'acting'.

I handed out sheets of paper each with several headlines. I played a recorded voice-over of me reading the headlines.

Each person with a headline placed their paper somewhere on the stage. I then invited people to stand near the headline they were most interested in. I directed people to let others in that group know about why they had chosen that headline. After that I got them to report back briefly to the whole group. While it was obvious which headline was most highly chosen, I summarised the themes and elements from each group's report back so the commonalities between groups were identified and the interests of the group as a whole made apparent.

The following two were the ones chosen on different nights: "Homeless tents taken by council before Art Deco event", "Government's benefit changes: More people to receive 'work check-ins'".

Together we identified the individuals and groups that would need to be present for the situation to be enacted. I directed people to take up various roles e.g. politicians including the prime minister and finance minister, the media, the mayor, homeless people, advisor, council staff member.

Everyone took up their roles interacting with others according to the newspaper story. What struck me was the ease and enthusiasm people brought to the stage. During the enactment I used the technique of spotlighting to enable everyone to hear and get the gist of what was happening in other groups. I produced whole group role reversals, so people got to gain insight from different perspectives and experiences.

I encouraged audience participation by directing them to point to where they thought the power lay in the system and to say why they thought that. At other times I asked them if they thought some part of the system was absent and if so, who else needed to be present in the enactment?

After the enactment I directed the integration phase in which everyone shared something of their experience in the role(s) they had taken, what

they had noticed and what insights they had gained. This sharing was in alignment with what I had hoped; being part of this session expanded people's awareness of others.

Follow up

I planned to follow up participants after the event as I wanted to know what the lasting impact of the sociodrama had been. Five months later I approached participants that I didn't know that well and asked them the following questions:

- What did you expect?
- What made you come?
- What is still lingering with you?
- What felt substantial?
- Did anything stand out for you?
- Did anything not make sense or feel unanswered?
- Would you recommend this to anybody? If so, who? (like what type of person?).

The following is a sample of responses.

A CEO of a not-for-profit organisation who had attended with his partner and daughter had come because he wanted to support me. He thought the session was ok but he wouldn't recommend it to any of his friends. He did however think it would be suitable for people who liked to experiment. Nothing had really stood out for him. Talking further about his experience in various roles he reflected that it was very easy to be the mayor as he was used to making decisions. By contrast he said how hard it was being a homeless person experiencing the reality of how much was just being done to him that he couldn't control. He said that as a result of the experience he was more aware that things just aren't as easy for everybody as they were for him.

Two young public servants let me know they also came to support me and thought it would be fun. Neither could really get hold of anything that lingered. Their excitement rose as we talked a little about the headline chosen and they remembered people being the prime minister. One commented that it was really hard being the advisor and as a result of taking this role in the sociodrama they had developed a bit more sympathy for the minister's office. This generated a response from the other person who commented that it helped them see that they are working in a system. One of them said that the sociodrama had stimulated quite a discussion

between him and his boyfriend who had talked about the session all the way home.

One woman said she was unable to listen to the radio to hear the news as it just was too much for her but after the show, she found herself able to listen again. Somehow, she said she had remembered that we are all humans.

Another person had come because she loves the Fringe Festival and as a social worker thought my show could be useful. She had come with her friend and had spent the night talking about the experience. She said it had given her a visceral reminder that there are many ways of looking at something and that reversing roles around the system had helped her quickly to move from her mind into her heart and body. She could see how taking this approach with her students or teams she works with would be so powerful. She was excited that all these months later she still had vivid memories of being “forced out of one lane to another to another” as the lasting impact of role reversal has had on her.

Reflections and developments

Overall, I feel satisfied.

I set out to run a sociodrama that would attract an audience that would be excited and engaged by the method to the extent that it would have a real impact. I managed to achieve that. Although there were bits that were clumsy there was enough action, the drama wasn't like a role play full of hammy caricatures. Participants expressed themselves authentically, the role reversals enabled people to experience different perspectives, and the feedback revealed genuine increase in awareness, insight and spontaneity. All three sessions were different. One night 39 people attended with some people returning. I felt well supported by the Wellington psychodrama community and noticed the effect of having experienced people functioning as auxiliaries in the group facilitated the experience for people not familiar with the method.

The feedback has led to me making two changes that I will try next time:

1. Providing a readout summarising where everything finished e.g. “Here we have four homeless people feeling frustrated, here the mayor is struggling to ...” etc. The readout would not necessarily be conducted by the director but could be someone in the role of reporter or possibly one sentence from each role.
2. Allocate more time for the integration phase so everyone can make sense of what has been enacted and make more meaning of their sharing in terms of what ongoing impact the sociodrama has for them.

Connection with Moreno and continuing his work

I enjoyed reading about Moreno's influence of the Theatre of Spontaneity on modern drama.

The central task of the Viennese Theatre of Spontaneity between 1921 and 1923 was to bring about a revolution of the theatre, completely to change the theatrical events. It attempted this change in a fourfold manner:

1. *Elimination of the playwright and the of the written play*
2. *Participation of the audience, to be a "theatre without spectators." Everyone a participant, everyone is an actor*
3. *The actors and the audience are now the only creators. Everything is improvised, the play, the action, the motive, the words, the encounter and the resolution of conflicts*
4. *The old stage has disappeared, in its place steps the open stage, the stage space, the open space, the space of life, life itself.*

Moreno, 1971, p. 84

I'm inspired by this experience to take sociodrama to the streets. It doesn't matter to me that it's not perfect or that people don't have prior experience of the method. There are so many social issues to explore that are relevant to us all and I believe it is worth taking the chance to have our method facilitate the expression of our collective spontaneity and creativity.

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Cissy Rock is a sociodramatist who is fired up by the power of relating to each other. With a huge heart, warm sense of humour and love of donuts and coffee Cissy produces relatable and participatory experiences.

Freedom to Fly: Reflections on a psychodrama group for women impacted by sexual abuse

Marian Hammond

Key words: auxiliary, compassion, connection, empathy, group therapy, healing process, perpetrator, tele, trauma, sexual abuse, shame, shared experience

As I grew up I often heard my mother say, “A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind”. This quote from the early 18th century English poet Alexander Pope underscores the power of empathy and how shared common experience and understanding produce a remarkable sense of kindness and compassion. With fellow feeling generated by shared experience and mutual tele, the understanding of the other’s feelings extends to include caring for the other’s well-being, usually expressed in a strong desire to be helpful companions to one another. For 25 years the Freedom to Fly Group has embodied this profound experience of spirit and solidarity.

In this article I describe key aspects of the group and highlight what is unique about it. Case examples provide windows into the work in which the power of the ‘wondrous others’ can be seen in the healing of sexual abuse.

Shoulders on which we stand

The Freedom to Fly group stands on the shoulders of the Therapeutic Spiral Model (TSM™) which was developed and brought to New Zealand by Dr Kate Hudgins and Francesca Toscani from the United States in the late 1990’s. Psychodramatist and psychologist Estelle Mendelsohn and I originally developed groups for women effected by sexual abuse. We incorporated our existing training in psychodrama with our learning in the TSM™ about how to work with trauma using psychodrama. Over the years we have been fortunate in having government funding from the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC)¹ make it possible for the majority of clients to attend the groups. So why was this group created?

¹ ACC is a government owned entity which provides compulsory insurance cover for personal injury for everyone in New Zealand. Through the Sensitive Claims Service a range of services are available including counselling for anyone who has experienced sexual violence.

The legacy of sexual abuse

After over 40 years of therapeutic work in this area I have an acute awareness of the legacy of sexual abuse trauma. The major impacts show up as themes arising from some of the following areas of difficulty: Trusting others, setting and maintaining boundaries, identifying and expressing feelings, being self-compassionate, being in one's body, being true to oneself, and feeling good about oneself. It is not uncommon for those who attend the groups to experience being so competent in the outside world, while simultaneously feeling so vulnerable inside.

Sexual abuse triggers shame which can be extremely painful and crippling to one's sense of self, thwarting one's ability to take their place in the world. Shame is triggered by the powerlessness inherent in sexual abuse. Almost always we hear the belief expressed, "It was my fault," a shame reaction. Coupled with this, shame has a tendency to bind with other emotions and thus prevent their normal expression. So rather than grieving and letting go, shame keeps the reaction to sexual abuse very much alive in the present. Perhaps though, the most potent impact is the profound sense of 'aleness' the survivor experiences.

The camaraderie in the group mitigates the sense of aleness that lies deep within each woman living with the impacts of sexual abuse. Alice's² description of her experience of the group highlights this phenomenon:

'There is a safety in knowing people have been through a similar journey. You feel you belong to a group even though it is coming from trauma. You realise you are not alone as you sit with these wonderful people who have these complex lives. They carry on with their lives then they are brave enough to heal, because it is not easy work. Knowing how it feels when you get that growth, you can't beat that feeling.'

There are many potential benefits for clients attending the groups. These include: the alleviation of shame and guilt, reduction of isolation, increasing the ability to experience a range of emotions, learning to identify and express needs and set limits, building a solid sense of self and developing trusting relationships. All of these outcomes support the client to live their lives out of their authentic self, the inner stage of who they really are, rather than living on an externally based stage in reaction to the trauma, preoccupied with the environment and ensuring safety. I discovered psychodrama is a potent method in the facilitation of this transition. So who are the women who come to the groups?

Who attends?

Clients who attend the group need to have a 'readiness' to do so. This means

² All names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

that they need to have sufficient ego strength to maintain themselves in the group setting. The group is not for everyone. For some the very idea of the group feels too exposing, anxiety provoking and too much out of their comfort zone. Typically, clients come to the group in the later stage of their sexual abuse therapy, although this is not always the case.

The majority of clients who attend the group have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), most often with associated attachment disturbances. There are a range of other DSM V³ diagnoses that clients present with. These include: major depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, attachment disorders, substance abuse, borderline personality disorder and dissociative disorders.

Referring therapists are increasingly more aware of the value of concurrent individual and group therapy and see the group as a useful adjunct to their ongoing therapeutic work with clients. Sometimes therapists refer clients to the group reporting a sense of 'stuckness' in individual therapy. Their therapist considers they would benefit from the reduction of isolation that meaningful encounter with other women impacted by sexual abuse can bring. The group can be useful in providing a roadmap for participants in terms of learning what is possible in the realm of healing, and how they can do their therapeutic work.

Uniqueness of the group

The weekend therapeutic group is unique in a number of ways: first, in its leadership which involves a team approach of two leaders and three trained auxiliaries, second, in the engagement with each individual referring therapist prior to and after the group, and third, in the tailoring of the psychodrama method to meet the specific needs of those living with the effects of sexual abuse.

We knew the TSM™ concept of having a team to hold the complexity and inherent demands of trauma work has a lot of merit. There are many aspects of the group that require firm consistent holding: the space, relationships, wellbeing of the participants, the group's structure as well as nourishment at mealtimes. These are all the tasks a 'good enough mother' would perform. I see the team as the 'heart of the group'.

In the active practice of manaakitanga, clients are warmly welcomed into the group by team members and their needs are seen as paramount. From the outset the auxiliaries wholeheartedly signal their availability for support of individuals when needed. As well, auxiliaries enact the more challenging roles involving perpetrators and/or wounded children, if the leaders assess the participant is not ready to experience these.

3 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition by The American Psychiatric Association*

In a sense the referring therapist is also a team member, facilitating the client's warm up to the group and holding the client beyond the group. Engagement in individual therapy is a requirement for attendance of the group. Typically, it is the therapist who begins the process of warming up their client to the group. Together they are invited to complete a brief preparation form identifying goals, a support person for the client and any relevant health details. In speaking with the therapist prior to the group, an introduction to the client is given, which includes a brief history, goals, current therapeutic work and anything we may need to be aware of. The therapist's assessment of the client's readiness is critical to us as a team. There is, however, another form of assessment.

Over the past couple of years, I have met with all attending clients online, or in person, prior to the group to assist in their preparation for the group, as well as ensuring their readiness to attend. Most importantly this encounter means the client has one familiar face to help ease their transition into the group.

After the group, how the client fared is shared with the therapist by way of a written summary and most often, a verbal account as well.

Let's now see how the group unfolds and discover some ways in which psychodrama is tailored to meet the needs of this client group.

Journey through the weekend

Agnes is a courageous adventurer as she enters the group room on Friday night, quite frankly, she is terrified. As she takes her seat she feels completely naked. At a very basic level simply by being there, she is admitting to herself and everyone else, that she had been sexually abused. As she listens, she struggles to get any words out. Yet she experiences "an incredible connection" with the other women. Simultaneously, she feels exposed, in part this is mitigated by her experience of the group allowing her "to wrap herself in the curtains in the wings". For Agnes just being there was so painful, and yet so oddly comforting. Her brain struggled to make sense of the profound impact of the fellow feeling, the acceptance, and support. It was a night never to be forgotten, Agnes had made a foray out of a lifetime of isolation.

Circle of scarves

Early in the group moving into action helps alleviate the palpable anxiety in the room. The TSM™'s 'circle of scarves' is a creative way of achieving this movement. Each group member is invited to introduce themselves and concretise with a scarf(s) a strength role, or resource that they bring to the group. Examples of internal strengths include: *The courageous explorer*, *determined truth speaker* and *compassionate heart*. Interpersonal strengths can be concretised, for example, a friend, grandmother, wahine toa (a female

warrior), as well as spiritual, and/or cultural strengths. The scarves are linked to form a circle which remains for the duration of the group. The circle reflects colour, flow, creativity, kindness, optimism, courage and hope. It delineates the stage, symbolically mirroring the holding of the group.

The circle of scarves reflects an important principle of the work; the need for each participant to connect with roles that are restorative and empowering in trauma work. It is vital the participant is not retraumatised in the process of the groupwork.

At the beginning of all psychodrama enactments a team of strength roles are chosen which, in addition to the above, may include friends, cats, partners, the sea, tupuna (ancestors), all of whom help maintain the participant's presence and groundedness.

Artwork

Next in the two hour opening session, artwork provides a time in which the participants can be with themselves and be intentional, depicting their goals and hopes for the group. Over the years a range of media have been used including clay, painting, collage, drawing and sandtrays. Occasionally group members choose to express themselves through other means like poetry. As group members depict their goals and anchor additional strengths and resources on their page, they are assured there are no prizes for artists.

The question of "Who's here?" is revealed on another level through each person's expression and what they choose to share. The artwork is revisited at the end of the group and the transformation is portrayed. Many clients choose to share their art with their therapists to assist in the integration of the workshop. The next day the second group session begins with an opportunity for embodied expression.

Soliloquys

Participants are warmed up to experience being in their bodies, connecting with feelings and thoughts and expressing these as they become aware of them. At the outset a team member is invited to walk the circle on stage with a containing double⁴ (CD) beside them, expressing their moment-to-moment experience to the universe. This expression of the person's stream

4 This adaption of the classical psychodrama double was developed in the TSM™ to ensure stability and presence in the here and now. From the outset the CD aims to create a warm empathic bond with the protagonist, so she knows someone is with her supporting her through the work. Always speaking as "I" the CD has three tasks that facilitate containment: An empathic reflective statement of what the client is experiencing; a containing statement that connects the client with their ability to cope and hold themselves and a statement anchoring the client in the here and now. The CD spontaneously adapts to the specific needs of the client and the moment in making these statements.

of consciousness is permission giving in modelling the honouring of one's authentic feelings and free expression of truth. It is empowering for the participants to observe members of the leadership team sharing their vulnerability as human beings and to experience this as strength, rather than weakness.

In this session group members are invited to make a sociometric choice of a team member to be a CD for them who will walk the circle with them. Tele informs them who will attune best to them. Many clients speak of hiding who they really are in the world. The implicit message in this group setting is, "Here is a place we can truly be who we are today." It is common to experience a sense of 'exposure' as the participant steps onto the stage. This is mitigated by the solid presence of the CD, the compassion of the 'wonderous kind' and the participant's courage in seeking a new experience of themselves out of the shadows. Also, it seems there is something about the movement around the stage that assists participants in keeping connected with their experience. For both participants and the leadership team, witnessing the gentle revealing of who each person is creates true magic.

Psychodramas

Over the remainder of the weekend there are a number of protagonist centered psychodrama sessions interspersed with group processing. The following description and discussion of three of these sessions aims to illuminate some of the ways in which the psychodrama method is adapted to this specific client group.

Fran

Fran is a 40-year old woman who is capable and strong. Between the ages of 9 and 11 years she endured sustained and prolonged sexual abuse by a young male from her church who was employed as a weekly child minder for her and her two siblings. The abuse stopped when the perpetrator moved to another area. After a long illness Fran's mother died when she was 12 years old. At age 17, Fran was violently sexually assaulted by a trusted male family friend with whom she was living. Fran rejected her younger self with intensity, for she held all the painful feelings that Fran was terrified of experiencing. The following accounts are from two psychodrama sessions with Fran a year apart.

In Fran's first psychodrama her purpose was to shift the blame for the sexual abuse onto the perpetrator. She assembled her team to support her which included her lion who holds the strength and courage for her that she can't hold herself. The auxiliary in the lion's role was instructed to jump out and protect Fran when she saw she couldn't protect herself. As

Fran said, “Who is going to mess with a lion.” Her close friend Janice, who is wise and compassionate formed another vital part of Fran’s support team.

In a first scene Fran worked to create some openness and warmth towards her 17-year-old self. As she faced her the intensity of feeling struck panic in Fran and she began to hyperventilate. I helped her coregulate by taking her hands, looking into her eyes, asking her to slow her breathing and to breathe with me. Fran grounded herself, bringing herself back into the present moment with her team. Her terror subsided and there was a softening in her as she shifted towards some acceptance of her younger self. This shift allowed Fran’s movement into a second scene.

In this scene Fran sought to desensitise herself to the perpetrator, diminishing what she experienced as his monster-like power over her. She chose a team member to be the perpetrator, who she placed behind a glass wall at the far end of the stage. Two security guards were engaged to keep him contained. The team member enacting the perpetrator did an exquisite portrayal using a deep voice and an accurate tone, as the words, “It wasn’t your fault. I would have done it (the sexual assault) anyway” are repeated over and over. Finally, Fran allows those words to land in her and she realises there wasn’t anything she could have done to make the assault not happen.

Fran needed the perpetrator to take responsibility and remove all the responsibility from her. I made the assessment that achieving this shift through role reversal was not an option, as Fran could not have tolerated this. However, the image of the perpetrator being contained, together with the auditory input of his words produce the change. Shedding her sense of responsibility freed Fran to experience previously dissociated feelings and to begin to mourn her loss. In another session in a longer residential Freedom to Fly group a year later, Fran engaged in a psychodrama shifting a further layer of responsibility. She was supported by the same key strength roles, as in her earlier psychodrama.

To survive her earlier sexual abuse Fran created a rich imaginal world of an intricate system of beings, or “parts” as she called them, that enabled her survival. Initially Fran chose to meet on stage with ‘the central organiser’ who was the leader of all the others. This role had been her strength all through the earlier years of sexual abuse. However, six years later with a different perpetrator, ‘the central organiser’ could no longer protect Fran by giving her a place to go in her imagination to hold herself through the sexual assault. This failure had been an enormous grief to Fran who saw this as a weakness. Other beings in the system were concretised on stage, all had believed if they worked together, they could block out reality. Fran named one of her beings *the great pretender* who reported having a 1000 masks to hide the sexual abuse from the others.

'The preparer' protected and numbed Fran to the impending doom, telling her what to do.

Fran began by blaming the 'central organiser' for failing to protect her, leaving her to experience the rawness and pain of the sexual assault. A number of audience members appeared aghast at the extreme expectation Fran had of herself. After several role reversals Fran softened and began to accept that she is a human being with limits. She acknowledged her truth, "I survived one monster but couldn't adapt to another." She knew it was time to forgive herself for not being able to go behind the shield that one last time.

Spontaneously Fran invited her mother onto the stage and for the first time disclosed the sexual abuse to her. There was relief and sadness in Fran as the words finally found their way out of her mouth. She melted into a hug with her mother. Then Fran introduced her mother to all those on stage who had protected her and asked her mother to take care of them. Fran made a sculpture of all the beings held by her mother and it was obvious she was satisfied with what she had created.

Fran acted in new ways in old situations. She could finally let go of self-reproach for not keeping her protective system going. She naturally and easily warmed up finding her spontaneity to create a new relationship with her mother.

The minute she told her mother of the sexual abuse she could let go of her protective system, asking mother to hold all of that in the afterworld.

Aurora

In the group Aurora had been in what she describes as a "dark place" all weekend. She identified that she wanted to express her anger, but she is not sure how to, or who to. Aurora let us know that anger was "a really scary place" for her. She made two excellent sociometric choices of group members for support roles in her drama. The first member was invited to be herself. Aurora's brief for her was to make spontaneous quips to bring light into the darkness as the drama unfolded. She was a *quick witted comedian*. The second group member was chosen for her capacity to feel and express anger. Aurora knew exactly how to pick the right person who became a maximising double, enlivening the protagonist in her expression of her affect in its pure form. The double enlisted the help of a team member to assist her in being fully effective in her role.

As Aurora warmed up to the expression of her anger she was swamped and bound up in shame. She named her adoptive parents as the perpetrators who she wanted to address and chose team members for these roles. A reversal of the power dynamic occurred with Aurora looking at them in the eye, rather than vice versa, as it had always been. She silenced them

with gags as she named some of the horrific traumas they had inflicted.

The maximising double's modelling of the expression of anger gave Aurora the necessary permission to keep fighting, in doing so lifting the shame. The whole group were witnesses and allies as Aurora worked up to sustained potent expression of her anger, interspersed with sadness. Humorous quips created the much needed pendulation towards and away from the intense darkness. In a final act the person chosen to be the comedian created giant sculptures of two mouths, one for each perpetrator. All the demeaning and contemptuous words they had used to shame Aurora were literally shoved back into the mouths of the perpetrators, using soft toys as props. For the protagonist and all her auxiliaries on and off stage, this enactment was enormously satisfying and freeing.

The auxiliaries knew how to enact the roles of the perpetrators from what they had learned from Aurora's story, their own spontaneity and personal knowledge. The auxiliaries benefitted from the experience, as we learned later in the sharing. It was excellent for Aurora not to need to step into their roles as she was already over identified with these perpetrators. They had imposed themselves on her all her 49 years of life and now she needed to experience herself. However, as seen in the drama she could not do this alone.

For those impacted by sexual abuse trauma Davis (1991) referred to anger as the backbone of healing and she underscored the importance of directing anger to the perpetrators and those who failed to protect them. A week after her psychodrama Aurora reported that she had begun to feel quite good about her anger and that now she had no need to apologise to herself for being angry.

There are two key roles involved in the healing of trauma in the described psychodrama and in fact in the entire work of the group: the witness and the ally.

Genevieve

The witness and ally are critical in mitigating the aloneness I referred to earlier. There are many witnesses and allies supporting the client in their healing and these are located both outside and inside the group. These include ACC, the therapist, support person(s) outside the group, together with the team and other participants inside the group. In turn, the participant is a witness and ally to herself. Through her adult eyes she can bring a new perspective, understanding and empathy to her younger self. The power of the impact of the external and internal witnesses and allies is illustrated in Genevieve's nuanced account of her experience in the group over time:

'Each time I could show a little bit more of myself, to my inner world as well as the group, because they kept me cocooned in the wings for as long as I needed. They saw me, my pain and horror, without knowing it in detail, and that allowed me to be able to see myself. They also saw things I couldn't, strengths, kindness, etc. That quote from Moreno about plucking your eyes out and seeing from another's, it was much safer to see from theirs and go away and have their sight percolate away for months after, still today.'

What Genevieve is describing is empathic attuned witnessing. The pioneer of a body-centered psychological approach to trauma Peter Levine said, "Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness" (Levine, 2010, p.xii). This emphasises the importance of having someone who can truly understand and validate our experiences. Together with the *empathetic attuned witness*, the ally is present and all ears. The term *active ally* seems fitting as the role requires genuine personal effort and attention.

In the group we all make a conscious choice to show up and listen and be with uncomfortable stories and feelings.

Why I love this work

The group embodies the best human experience of being in community and enacting values of empathy, kindness and generosity. I experience the generosity of spirit as incredibly moving at times. I enjoy the laughter that spontaneously erupts on occasion throughout the group. In the group I often reference Max Clayton who said, "Someone who can cry and laugh at the same time is a mentally healthy person."

The group is powerful as a multi-dimensional encounter, a tapestry of rich nuanced responses from both team and participants. Therapeutically a lot of ground is covered, and the whole experience is very intense. A previous attendee once likened individual therapy to black and white television and the Freedom to Fly group to colour television.

I am grateful to all the brave souls who have put their 'trust in the process'. I have loved witnessing their compassion with women who most often they have only just met. The healing outcomes are achieved through empathy and a profound level of understanding from shared experiences. I believe the group is a testimony to the power of teamwork. These sentiments are reflected in the following feedback from two participants:

'In these workshops, I can cry, releasing a lot of what I cannot allow myself to feel in the outside world. A lot of the chaos that goes on in my head, is exhaled inside a structure that is safe. One-on-one therapy is great, especially with my therapist, but coming into contact with other women that know how I feel and can often mirror my own experiences is such

a power tool in my healing. It makes me feel less crazy, less alone in my trauma and just that little more connected.'

'This group has been transformative for me. The compassion and acceptance here have allowed me to deal with things I have carried too long. It is a place where real change happens.'

I have a deep appreciation of the co-leaders and team auxiliaries I have worked with over the years. Their commitment to the group is always very moving. In the service of the protagonist and the whole group difficult roles are enacted with willingness and spontaneity. They are truly the *wonderous kind*.

Conclusion

In the Freedom to Fly group, women meet women who have experiences of sexual abuse that resonate with their own. In the presence of a five strong leadership team, a group culture is co-created that is characterised by non-judgmental acceptance and compassion. Such a group environment is ideal for healing the inevitable shame that accompanies the participants. Typically, avoidance of feeling and in fact anything to do with the trauma, creates challenges in trauma therapy. The implicit message of PTSD is "Let's not go this way again." In connecting with and expressing feelings and addressing traumatic material normally avoided, the group offers participants a memorable authentic experience of themselves. They see and experience themselves in a new light. Inherent in the group functioning is permission to feel, for there is no need to don the mask worn in the outside world. Psychodrama, the 'theatre of truth' actively calls out authentic expression of self. The Freedom to Fly group offers those who attend, through all their fragility, a way to lower their guard gradually and experience a precious new way of being in the world. Each woman is invited to push past feelings of exposure and awkwardness as she arrives on stage and stretches into new areas of role development, she is celebrated by a group of witnesses and allies every step of the way. Often the weekend is described as "life changing."

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Jackson: Cultivating community, the systemic nature of mutual tele

Carol Mattinson

Everyone knew Jackson. He was a big black labrador that lived behind a very small fence. Maybe that was the attraction, why people knew and loved him. He was so big and never jumped out. Kids on bikes, workmen in the next street, people walking by would stop and pat him. Jackson was very happy at home behind his little fence with his family and watching the goings on in the street.

After my mother died, one day I was feeling sad. I looked at my dog Hunter, an independent pit bull cross, and thought, you are not going to get this. I need Jackson. So, I went to where he was and put my face into his lovely warm body and cried. It was true. Jackson did understand. He was the perfect comforter.

When I got my dog Pippa as a tiny puppy, it was just before the first lockdown. I didn't want her to suddenly see the world after lock down and get a fright, so I put her in a wheelbarrow and took her round the block. Jackson was her first friend. He was four years old at the time and very gentle with his big body never hurting the little pup.

As time went on, I got to have Jackson come and stay at my house when his family went on holiday. My friends would hear I was looking after him and come round just to see the gentle giant. Everybody loved Jackson.

One little boy of eight would wait at the gate when Jackson was confined after surgery, asking to see him. After a few weeks he had had enough of the waiting and said to Gordon the owner, "I have known him for eight years. He is practically my dog you know." The little gang of kids on bikes would ride around the streets after school delighted if they saw Jackson or Pippa.

So Jackson was a community dog with his own family but dearly loved by many. It came as a shock to us when at the young age of eight he was diagnosed with aggressive cancer. His family and the neighbourhood only had a few days to get their heads around the idea before he died.

I like cried like many even though he wasn't my dog. I thought where can all that love go? I need to do something; it can't just be gone.

So when my friend arrived with the quarter of a sunflower head, I planted the seeds with an idea I would give a plant to everyone who loved Jackson.



A sunflower in Jackson's Avenue, my driveway.

At first I told no one. I just looked after the seedlings like I had never looked after a plant in all my life. I watched them break through the soil and lose their little hats, the seed case. I looked after them with sheep poo for fertiliser and guarded them from pests. Some were big and some not so big. I counted them to make sure there were enough.

Then when it was time, I told the family of Jackson. I told them of my plan to give everyone who loved him one and they came to select theirs. The thing that surprised me was everyone wanted their own sunflower. It wasn't just one for the household. In Jackson's house there were three family members so they each had their own sunflower as did the two ladies next door who helped me look after him at times.

I went visiting when the sunflowers were about two months old. I felt tentative knocking on people's doors and saying "here is a sunflower I grew for Jackson. You can have one because you loved him too." I gave them out with sheep poo and snail bait. Sometimes people didn't want the snail bait, but everyone wanted the sheep poo.

I planted sunflowers all up my driveway. I mulched them, fed them, watered them and sometimes very quietly sang to them. They grew and grew and grew. They were the biggest sunflowers I had ever seen. It was exciting to see the flowers emerging not only in my driveway but in other people's garden. It was like the yellow flower was a candle to his memory.

Then the talk began. People would say, "have you seen my sunflower, how big it is?" "Mine is just coming out." "We had to shelter ours from the wind." "Have you seen the one at ... house. It is taller than the roof."

It was like the flowers bought a burst of happiness to all of us. People would gather round the driveway to look at Jackson's sunflowers and go see them at other houses. My friends who lived in other area of town sent photos when their sunflowers came out. The family were gathering photos of all Jackson's sunflowers.

One lady a few streets away had lost her husband. She came back from his tangi and said the sunflower had come out while they were away. She was comforted to see its yellow face.

People became excited about gathering the seeds and planting more. When the petals blew away the little boy next door wondered if I could find them and staple them back on. I told him he can have some seeds to grow his own and he was happy.

The owner of Jackson had the idea of digging up his front lawn and planting it in sunflowers next year and while his wife looked dubious, she was happy to go along with the idea.

I knew Jackson the big black Labrador we all loved was gone but some of the love he bought with him to a neighbour was carrying on. Jackson left

behind a more connected community of people who shared the sorrow of his passing and from that, a deeper connection with each other. For a psychodramatist, there was an enriching of the social atom of many and some social atom repair on the matter of loss and grieving.

There was mutually positive tele between neighbours as we shared our love of dogs and sunflowers. The spontaneous idea of growing flowers in his memory brought forth greater spontaneity, with shared photos made into a collage. Now, almost a year later, last year's seeds are being planted in gardens and passed on to people in other areas of New Zealand. I have received photos of the seedlings emerging from delighted new gardeners. Those not knowing how to grow seeds have consulted others and so the connections continue.

I never knew there could be two bests

Carol Mattinson

My dog Pippa and her best friend Jack
a best friend from whom she could learn
how to be the best dog in the neighbourhood.

Now the best dog in the neighbourhood
requires being as kind as can be.

Watching people walking by
and choosing
just who needs to give extra pats,
to stop and not move.
Not one inch.

If there is something of interest to you
not distracted by the tug on the lead,
or someone encouraging
you to move along.

No. To be the best dog in the neighbourhood
you need to sit still,
until what you see is no longer in view.

My dog Pippa
learnt from her best friend Jack
how to be the best dog in the neighbourhood.

Old and young people stop to say hello
and the adults often leave saying 'you made my day,'
while the children gather
in little groups
to visit the best dog in the neighbourhood.

There's nothing to worry about
when you have the best dog.

They are happy every day with everything.

They snuggle up close in the early hours
from sleeping in other rooms as pups
until they've made it onto the bed.

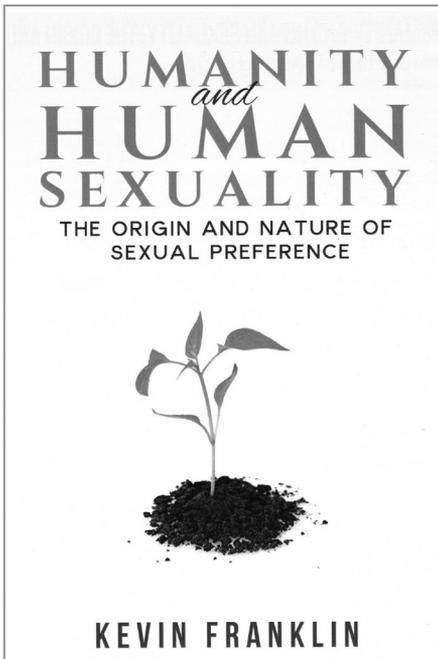
I am so grateful
my dog Pippa learnt from her best
friend Jack.

How to be the best dog in the neighbourhood.



Carol Mattison lives and works in Palmerston North and together with her labrador Pippa, enjoys the close proximity to the sea, mountains, and the Ruahine ranges. She is an advanced trainee in psychodrama and completed her thesis a number of years ago. Carol works as a counsellor, supervisor and group worker in the community. She recently started to work voluntarily in an organisation providing a community meals for about 200 people.

Book review



Humanity and Human Sexuality: The Origin and Nature of Sexual Preference

By Kevin Franklin
Austin Macauley Publishers Ltd
London, 2024

Reviewed by

Elizabeth Synnot

This scholarly book stimulates my thinking and deep reflections, challenges my knowledge base, expands my lexicon, and builds my capacity for role reversal. It presents action research of a scientific and academic standard relating to the

origin and nature of sexual preference. For those who enjoy scientific epistemology, logical and rational writing, who delight in J L Moreno's approach, whose curiosity is aroused by a cogent world view, or who want to improve the world for individuals and the whole of society, this is a book for you.

As a longtime colleague of Dr Franklin, Kevin to me, I delight to see his application of J L Moreno's role theory, spontaneity theory, his theory of personality and his group focus in both the research design and interpretation of findings. The author presents the particular significance of Moreno's concept of role taking, role playing and role creating. I gained significant understanding of applying this to the imposed fraudulent approach to role taking of another's identity. Kevin points out that gay men are often coerced to be *role takers* of a heterosexual man's roles, i.e. their identity. The horror dawns on me that there is no learning in this imposed pretend identity. There is no congruence with one's psyche and sense of inner self. There is no role development that expands our inner being.

I warm up to Kevin's life and worldview early on in this book as he boldly includes his own life experiences. Imaginatively I deepen my ability to role reverse with being a gay man in Australia from the 1950s through

to today. From my own life I am aware that, unlike in 2024, homosexuality was a crime with imprisonment a reality or the real threat of it: when loving another was responded to as unnatural and an abhorrence, when many families were ashamed and rejected their gay child; when same sex couples were not considered as prospective parents, and when open attempts were made to drum gay men out of the workplace, when being stabbed or bashed to death was a real possibility, and when homosexuality was synonymous, in some quarters, with being a pedophile. The evidence is abundant that there is a devastating toll of being shunned as a social pariah, a sexual deviant, a criminal, and not suited for employment or parenthood.

Kevin makes a central tenet of this book that a person's well-being requires psychological order in the self and socius. The creating and shaping of a unifying world view that supports life's fullness for us all and the building of a new social order are fully argued. A way forward is outlined throughout the book.

Kevin documents the historical explanations that have been believed for same sex sexual preference and gender identity: genetics, adaptation to trauma, sexual seduction, and moral degradation, to name a few. These religious and culturally agreed beliefs have no scientific basis. However, in this book Kevin's research is scientifically valid and he finds that sexual identity does not correlate with sexual preference. The central finding here is that our subjective gender identity predicts our innate sexual preference.

The treasures in *The Labyrinth*, Chapter 2, are many. To name a few: adam and eve, gender identity, individuation, neurosis, and the psychosocial third universe. Deconstructing misinformation and culturally agreed stories and building an ordered and healthy perspective takes some 420 pages. I deeply reflected on many of the author's notes. For instance, the author makes a case for the term 'sexual preference' rather than 'sexual orientation' (Franklin, 2024, pp. 339-343).

I can see Kevin's perspective and his value for words to be precise and their meaning to be consistent with life-fullness. It is a bold move to include the term 'sexual preference' in the book's title as some may be put off from reading on. I have been coached to use the term 'sexual orientation' by my gay clients for a couple of decades. I understand that sexual orientation as a phrase has been adopted for some time by the gay men's movement.

While I gained from reading this book, I found some paragraphs dense and some ideas not engaging. For instance, a central platform of the way forward is a Theory of Person. I cannot see how it improves on J L Moreno's spontaneity theory, social and cultural atom, group emphasis, and encounter.

This book would benefit by scholarly journalists, psychodramatists and other professions, digging and delving and finding the many treasures here,

and presenting them to be accessible to those grappling with their sexual identity. For others, the contemplation of a revolutionary perspective on humankind and how to live well with one another will be your reward. I commend this book to a place on your bookshelf near your favourite reading spot.



*Talking to Country by *Nancy*

Talking To Country

Artist: *Nancy (*Pseudonym)

30 x 50 centimetres.

Acrylic on canvas.

Copyright: Artist.

Nancy's story:

This is a picture of Nikki sitting down with me talking about country and stories from my life. The first time I met Nikki I was very shy but a little bit happy. Talking about my stories makes me feel proud of myself and my families. I talk about my problems. Talking to Nikki helped me stay out of prison. I'm still free and sober. Many of my families went straight back drinking and fighting and straight back to prison but I didn't. Now I look after my families, they come to me, they trust me! I am strong inside.

Nikki's story:

I met Nancy about three years ago and now we are working together on a book about her life, her struggles and her amazing achievements in recovery. This painting really is how we are together. I love sitting down in the bush to work, it feels so healing to be connecting to each other and nature. We both draw our strengths from the rocks, and hills and wildflowers (which are out right now!). It's a privilege to be part of Nancy's recovery.

