

### Action Sociograms

For a comprehensive exposition of the full potential of Action Sociograms see the original article by Barbara Seabourne in *Group Psychotherapy, Volume XVI (1963) pp 145-155*. She gave three illustrations. The Phil Stack arrangement above provided another example of *the use of the sociogram in an interpretative session* (pp 150ff), whereby we see Phil's perception of group relationships to himself, and at the same time the group sociogram in response to him. So well did he do focus shifted to each person's relationship with others rather than to Phil. This approach has proved so fruitful I've used it to clarify interpersonal relationships in group psychotherapy classes.

An important dimension our example left out was the vertical, probably because Phil saw all the others present as peers, that is, with no significant status differences. Where such differences exist we represent them by having persons stand on chairs or sit on the floor.

Seabourne's initial application was (pp 146ff) *the informational family sociogram*, featuring one person's perspective on his family. Here we may obtain important items for social history, rapidly assimilate newcomers into ongoing groups, and discover problem areas. We provide newcomers with a vehicle for as much self-presentation as they feel they can risk at the outset, which propels their assimilation into full group membership, on the basis of which the other group members may freely respond.

Seabourne's third major application was (pp 154f) *transference to the director*, in which case the director has the group member take the director's role to arrange the members of the group, including himself, as he imagines the director sees them. The director stands in as an auxiliary for the protagonist. If one is available I bring in a trainee from the audience to oversee the process, to say those things it would be awkward for me to say while I'm in an auxiliary role.

There are risks in doing this. The trainee may not be fully in tune with the direction of the session, and may err in being

unnecessarily directive, and resistant to the director's reassuming the directorial role when it has become appropriate to do so. In most instances we may bypass the option without damaging the process, especially where others in the group hold a more realistic perception of the director.

The crucial step here is the feedback to the arranger through role reversals. The director should provide a double for the protagonist to make it easier for him to accept responses which confront his defense structure.

This doesn't come up very often in psychodrama groups because directors habitually remain open as themselves during the action portion of the psychodrama and in the sharing which follows. The more reality the less latitude for transference projections. Where they exist they can be corrected at once. Of course that means the loss of a major avenue of diagnosis and treatment traditional psycho-therapists have deemed essential, but the advantages of a group approach more than make up for it.

### Group Sociogram Opportunities

Seabourne lists eleven of these (pp 153f), most of which I shall present here in condensed form. We have already alluded to the option of having everyone role reverse with everyone else. She shows how directors may facilitate the process with questions such as, *Why are you so far away from her?* and *I notice you glaring at him, why is that?* We should freely use soliloquies in the role reversed position and again as ourselves, in the latter instance with or without doubles.

She wrote, *The sociogram may be cut and a behind-the-back scene done with (the arranger) who hears others discuss their reactions to where they were placed and how they saw themselves in relation to (the arranger)*. But I have found this ploy as confronting as the mirror, and never do it without providing the protagonist with a double. I prefer to have each person say what they have to say to his face. As I see it, the other group members need less protection than the protagonist. Routinely I ask every person to correct the position each has been placed

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in if they think the arranger has misrepresented the feeling. We may even go so far as to have others re-arrange the group in terms of how they feel the group reacts to the first arranger, if it seems the latter can handle it.

We may go beyond the interpersonal to the intrapsychic. With a particular arrangement before us, the arranger may say, *You're just like my mother*. We may drop the sociogram and go into a protagonist's relationship with her mother. Or we may hold off a moment as she identifies each member of the group with figures from her social atom. Some may feel flattered by the identification and build communication upon it, whereas others may hasten to correct it in the hope of developing a more realistic relationship. The director's option is whether to go into a traditional protagonist-centered psychodrama in behalf of the arranger or to keep it all on a realistic group-centered level for the sake of fostering group cohesiveness.

Another intrapsychic option arises when the arranger admits having mixed feelings. The director may have the arranger assign members of the group to the various feelings or roles he or she wishes to explore. The particular choices and the sequence of choosing may serve as valuable clues to the protagonist's world. Directors remember protagonist approaches (=choices) and avoidances (=rejections), which point to the next step the protagonist is ready to take. Also which script (of the 28) the protagonist is in the process of living through. This may be a counterscript the director shall have to deal with on the way to facilitating a more realistic and liveable script, which offers protagonists a better chance of getting what they really want.

#### **Innovative Rites-of-Passage**

Often we fail to accord cultural modes of transition as much attention as they deserve. We celebrate the milestones of a particular society just because they have long served as useful vehicles for individual development and participation. But sometimes it is easier to appreciate their value in societies other than our own. What must one do when coming of age? Early on there is Bar Mitzvah and Confirmation. Later, one must get a driver's license. Move away from home? Get a job? Graduate? Get married? Have a baby? I have discussed this in detail in *Celebrating*

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*Role Transition through Psychodrama* (1996 and a 2nd edition, 1998), but even there I failed to make space for the fascinating practices of so-called primitive societies, which do a better job than we do, what with the leveling effect of our secularism and pluralism.

We have recourse, however. We may put our spontaneity to work and create *ad hoc* what the situation calls for. Antony Williams has done this for us in *Visual and Active Supervision* (1995), especially in chapter 14. In a workshop he conducted recently for a group consisting of 15 experienced psychodrama directors we learned how.

He uses a systems approach, which has both similarities and differences with the action sociogram. It does not have as much emphasis on action as we find in psychodrama. We must look beyond the session itself to complete the action. On the other hand, space is used in the same symbolic way as the action sociogram. After every person had reacted to a particular image he or she had selected to facilitate self-presentation, we came to focus on a protagonist. Several among us took on the role of various aspects of the protagonist's issue. The interaction among these helped us to a consensus fully in accord with the spirit of the Central Concern Model.

The protagonist's confidence in the competence and goodwill of the group was manifest in her willingness to let us send her away, while we constructed a specific task for her, a kind of ritual, the completion of which would do for her what we believed needed to be done. Our director monitored the process and offered suggestions now and then.

When the protagonist returned, the group was assembled in a meaningful way, and one among us delivered the fruit of our labor, which she received without comment beyond making a firm agreement to see it through. As of this writing she is still in the process of making adequate preparation. We expect to receive feedback on how it went, and whether the *ad hoc* ritual did in fact do for her what all of us hoped it would. My best guess is that it can't miss!