

Section 4: Book Reviews

Book Review

***Shrink: The Untold Story of Psychiatry.* By Jeffrey A. Lieberman, MD. Little, Brown, 2015.**

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This new book by a leader in the field is yet another history of psychiatry. There are a number of such histories, and to my awareness this is the most recent. What is relevant for our psychodrama journal is the fact that this book quite leaves out Moreno and psychodrama. It shows how our field has become marginalized. Alas, this is also true for many other types of psychotherapies, so we should not feel singled out. Still, the book speaks to a number of issues relevant to our field.

First, we should realize that that role of psychodramatists is becoming marginalized within psychiatry, as are many other types of psychotherapies. “Marginalization” is a word that belongs in your vocabulary, because, like “postmodern” and other words, it speaks to phenomena that we should have a word for. Marginalization refers to the way things that may or may not have been commonly recognized have been pushed to the margins of the mainstream of at least that subculture—in this case, mainstream psychiatry.

Of course, history books must of necessity editorialize and leave out much, or else they would be nearly infinite in length. But we in psychodrama have a skewed view because we are a minority movement. Also, as I will note further on, psychodrama itself was born within the medical model of the Beacon Sanitarium in the late 1930s. However, psychodrama in association with sociometry was conceived a few years earlier in a more sociological context—meaning 1934, at the Hudson School for Girls. Before that, psychodrama’s roots were in Moreno’s Theatre of Spontaneity in Vienna and later New York City. What I mean by that is that although psychodrama grew mainly in the womb of psychotherapy, it has always transcended the traditional medical model!

The point here is that psychodrama and sociometry address psychosocial issues more than psychiatric issues. I think psychotherapy in general and psychodrama as a most relevant example are variably helpful in the medical model, but that may well not be their major application. I know that people with pretty good ego strength can use psychodramatic methods to work one or two levels up, in families and communities, to help one another be more inclusive and effective at problem solving. This is not a trivial challenge, but it does not involve the sick role.

Psychodrama's identification with group psychotherapy—as a group method—is problematic in some ways. It is good to recognize that people in groups can work on problems, even beyond the sick role. But as a community, those involved with psychodrama still tend to think of ourselves perhaps overmuch as part of therapy, with the implication that we are therapists who heal those who are sick. This is to some limited extent true—psychodrama has indeed been used as a form of therapy and is best known in this form. However, it should be noted that the method has applications in schools and other contexts beyond the sick role. Psychodramatic methods may also be integrated in a more general approach to group and family work, as noted in a new book by Corey (2016).

Moreno's interest in many areas of human potential besides psychotherapy—spontaneity, sociometry, creativity, spirituality, and so on—also brings up the idea that psychology too, in its broadest sense, transcends the medical model. Psychology's broadest application may well be to have some of its principles included in the treatment of not only those who are judged to be sick, but everyone. (Freud, too, saw his discovery as vastly transcending the medical model of treating those who were adjudged to be sick.)

The problem with psychiatry is that it evolved this double identity: While most of its practitioners were treating those who identified themselves or were identified by others, in fact many of its patients would better be described as “worried well” rather than truly mentally ill. Then there were some psychoanalysts such as Erich Fromm who wrote about the ways people were unconsciously influenced in the formation of their culture.

To this, I would add that Moreno also fed both goals, supporting psychotherapy and also supporting applications generally—to the point of imagining that an expert in psychodrama and sociometry could also be an expert in sociology. The point is that it is useful to recognize that for some time, psychodynamic psychiatry has commented not only on people who might be thought of as sick but also on wider circles of social interaction that merited closer examinations.

Meanwhile, Lieberman writes about psychiatry as if it should be more entrenched in medicine, pulling away from more philosophical and general social considerations. My perspective is that we should recognize that depth psychology applies not only to the challenge of sickness in society but also to the achievement of some understanding of nonsick dimensions at a political and cultural level. These double perspectives—for understanding mental illness and for understanding cultural phenomena—apply also for Jung's analytical psychology and Adler's individual psychology, as well as many other schools of thought. Of course, Moreno's ideas about spontaneity, creativity, and such also have applications not only in diagnosing and treating personal dysfunction but for the broader culture as well.

In this perspective, Morenian methods may find their main use in being integrated with cognitive therapy and various other approaches. Indeed, some role-playing already is being absorbed. We should recognize our dual nature as applying to the medical model and sick role but also to nonmedical contexts—that is, more as what Moreno meant by “sociatry.”

In summary, this book is interesting in showing the different social trends in psychiatry, and the way that psychotherapy functioned not only as a source of treatment for people who are mentally ill—the sicker patients—but also for a few decades as addressing people’s existential unease and the problems of the wider world. Moreno’s writings unfolded during this period of dual models, a time in the mid-20th century when the focus was not only psychiatric disorders but a wider analysis of human beings in a changing world.

REFERENCE

Corey, G. (2016). Psychodrama in groups. In *Theory & practice of group counseling* (9th ed., Chap. 8, pp. 189–224). San Francisco, CA: Cengage Learning.