

J. L. Moreno: The Origins of the Group Encounter Movement and the Forerunner of Web-Based Social Network Media Revolution

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The purpose of this article is to (a) acknowledge Moreno's merits as the founder of the Group Encounter Movement; (b) review a few ambiguities, contradictions, and backbiting that were evident in the Group Encounter Movement; (c) to identify Moreno as a pioneer in grounding and setting the stage for group psychology and group psychotherapy as an evidence-based therapy; and (d) pinpoint and recognize Moreno as the forerunner of our web-based social network media in virtual communities. Moreno joins the long, illustrious line of psychiatrists, psychologists, and group psychotherapists whose work continues to have an impact long after they have departed this world.

KEYWORDS: Group; group dynamics; group psychology; group psychotherapy; encounter; sociometry; psychodrama; sensitivity training; T-groups; Facebook.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

A brief survey of the origin and development of the group psychotherapy movement is a crucial but most difficult task, due to varied interpretations of group psychology and group psychotherapy during the embryonic stage(s) of the movement that emerged in the mid-1940s and peaked in the 1970s. In the late 1960s, Carl Rogers (1969) wrote:

It would, in fact, be surprising—and perhaps worse—if we were all that sure all this soon about what they are, because the group experience is

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so new. It is a potent new cultural development, an exciting social invention, a truly grass roots movement that has grown out of personal, organizational and social needs. (p. 27)

He emphasized that the Group Encounter Movement became a reality during the 1960s, although it is quite clear that the movement, at the time of his writing, was viewed as a very recent phenomenon. Due to this contemporary phenomenon, there are many conflicting attitudes regarding that genealogy of the movement (to mention a few, see Bonner, 1959; Cartwright & Zander, 1968; Hare, Borgatta, & Bales, 1968; Howard, 1970; J. L. Moreno, 1953a, 1953b; Ruitenbeek, 1970; Siroka, Siroka, & Schloss, 1971; Sorokin, 1966).

Although the Group Encounter Movement was a recent phenomenon in the 1960s, the ideas and knowledge it represented are, as developments in the applied behavioral sciences go, relatively old. For example, J. L. Moreno (1953a, 1953b), Ruitenbeek (1970), and Bonner (1959) point to the early empirical small action group studies stemming from Mesmer (1790), Tonnies (1887), Cooley (1902), Pratt (1905), Simmel (1908), Slavson (1911), Jacob Moreno (1911, 1913, 1991), Lazelle (1921), Dewey (1992), Mead (1934), Freud (1922), and Burrow (1927). It is important to keep in mind that the aforementioned studies, according to Renouvier (1948), certainly had a therapeutic precept, but they were lacking scientific rigor and technique (see also Treadwell & Treadwell, 1972). Group psychotherapy and the small-group concept had their derivatives in the action workshop ideology that dates back to the late 18th century. However, the results of the studies were extremely inadequate for understanding what went on in groups, which is understandable, because they lacked the scientific instruments to measure and examine the complexities of the small action group process.

The important point of reference came in 1931, at the American Psychiatric Association's annual meeting in Toronto, Canada, where A. A. Brill offered the discussant's role to J. L. Moreno on his paper "Abraham Lincoln as Humorist," in which Moreno defended Lincoln. This encounter allowed Moreno, known as an antagonist of this event, to gain notoriety among the psychiatric community and to introduce his social network analysis (J. D. Moreno, 2014). It was E. Stagg Whitin, an expert on prison reform, who arranged a roundtable discussion at this annual meeting to introduce innovations in penology and criminology, where J. L. Moreno presented his sociometric plan focusing on small groups based on interpersonal attributes, which was received well. As a result, Moreno was asked by the New York State Board of Corrections to conduct a study on the feasibility of group psychotherapy within the penal system at Sing Sing prison. With the assistance of a graduate assistant, Helen Hall Jennings, the research was carried out during 1931–1932 and published as a monograph entitled *Application of Group Method to Classification* (Nolte, 2008). Their results were reported at the 1932 American Psychiatric Association meeting in Philadelphia, where Moreno first introduced the terms *group psychotherapy* and *group therapy*. His presentation is considered to be the formal start of group psychotherapy, because this was the first time the term was used in the social sciences.

In addition, this presentation introduced sociometry, his system of measuring inter- and intrapersonal relationships within groups (Marineau, 1989). Consequently, in 1937 he created and published his first professional journal, *Sociometry: A Journal of Interpersonal Relations*, and in 1942 he developed the first Sociometric Institute in New York (Blatner, 2000; Marineau, 1989). Although Moreno sold his *Sociometry* journal in 1955 to the American Sociological Association, it is still active under the name International Network for Social Network Analysis and can be accessed at <http://insna.org/index.html>. The concept of social network analysis came from Moreno's sociometry generating the first representation of internal group structure in the 1930s, referred to as sociograms.

There is no doubt, according to Bain (1943), that "sociometry is and probably will remain a generic term to describe all measurements of societal and interpersonal data" (p. 212). According to Renouvier (1953), prior to sociometry

no one knew what the interpersonal structure of a group "precisely" looked like, in parts and as a whole, and therefore, no one knew how to isolate, prevent or predict disturbances in groups. In the pre-sociometric period all interpretations were based on hunches and intuitive speculations. (p. 72)

In short, the historical foundations of Moreno's system of interpersonal relations "is based upon the 'primary dyad,' the idea and experience of the *meeting* of two actors, the concrete-situational event preliminary to all interpersonal relations" (J. L. Moreno, 1953b, p. 64): the encounter. These fundamental sociometric foundations date back to approximately 1914, when Moreno first defined encounter and the encounter group concept.

ENCOUNTER GROUPS

Going back to 1914, Moreno defined and described *encounter* and the *encounter group* concept in much the same way as it is presently being experienced in groups. This is best illustrated by Johnson's argument that during the spring of 1914, articles were published by Moreno in a series of poetic writings that gave the current encounter movement a definition. Thus, *encounter* was the keystone for group psychotherapy and the encounter movement, best portrayed as

A meeting of two: eye to eye, face to face,
And when you are near I will tear your eyes out
and place them instead of mine, and you will tear
my eyes out and will place them instead of yours,
Then I will look at you with your eyes and you
will look at me with mine. (Johnson, 1959, p. 43)

The literary magazine *Daimon*, of which Moreno was the editor, carried in the February 1918 issue a dramatic dialogue by Moreno entitled "Einladung zu einer Begegnung: Die Gottheit als Autor" (Invitation to an Encounter: The Deity as

Author). In this article appears the term *interpersonal relations*, which was used by Robert MacDougall in 1912 and came to prominence in J. L. Moreno's book *Who Shall Survive?* (1953b) and in the journal *Sociometry*.

During the years 1918–1920, Martin Buber was a contributing editor of *Daimon*, and his articles appeared side by side with Moreno's, prophetic of the role each would have in the history of interpersonal theory. The I–Thou concept of God was the keystone of the interpersonal arc documented in their publications from 1920 to 1923 (Johnson, 1959).

One can readily trace an early awareness of interpersonal sensitivity and the sensitivity group phenomenon when J. L. Moreno writes:

There are actors who are connected with one another by an invisible correspondence of feelings who have a sort of heightened sensitivity for their mutual inner processes, one gesture is sufficient and often they do not look at one another, they communicate through a new sense as if by a “medial” understanding. (1947, p. 68)

There are many overtones to the way encounter is understood. Basically, it is a meeting of two with the opportunity to reverse roles. However, the two people can only look with the other's eyes when the relationship is basically equal—that is, both have the same amount of spontaneity. The encounter needs a place to happen or a place where the two can meet, and this place must provide time and stability to allow the process to occur. As a result, J. L. Moreno (1953a) described his “here and now” concept, the genesis of psychodrama, in 1911 and defined psychodrama as a group psychotherapy modality in 1913.

In psychodrama (for the classic article on the psychodramatic method, see J. L. Moreno, 1946), one individual is representative of the group in a self-exploration of the individual's own life, under the supervision of a director and supported by group members. One does this by reversing roles with the significant others in his or her world and viewing them and the self through different eyes. It has been expressed by many, for example, Blatner (1996, 2000); Karp, Holmes, and Tavon (1998); and Siroka et al. (1971), that of the many forms of sensitivity training, psychodrama uses both verbal and nonverbal techniques in exploring the self as well as developing the emotional interaction of the individual and the group.

J. L. Moreno urged all of his readers:

Take my ideas, my concepts, but do not separate them from their parents, the philosophy; do not split my children in half, like a Solomonic judgment. Love them in toto, support and respect the entire structure upon which they rest. Make them your own as completely as I do. Role reverse with me and out yourself entirely into my position. (Z. T. Moreno, 1969, p. 5)

This is Moreno the man and this is his credo; it was due to this quality of thinking that he was able to disseminate his ideas. However, after voluminous reading, the

results of his philosophy become strikingly apparent. There is no doubt that Moreno's concepts have been internalized and implemented into the contemporary concept of the group movement, yet in most instances the original creator has been all but forgotten.

At the risk of painting too grim a picture, let me cite an example from an article by Howard (1968) in which she described some of her group experiences at the Esalen Institute at Big Sur and the variety of techniques employed by leaders of the Human Potential Movement. Although she is one of the individuals who were unaware of the historical roots of group psychotherapy and the encounter collective, perhaps her omission can be overlooked on the grounds that she was not a behavioral scientist. Abraham Maslow, a former president of the American Psychological Association and a founder of the school of humanistic psychology, was nevertheless compelled to set the record straight, and so responded to her article. He wrote to the editors:

Sirs:

Jane Howard's article on Esalen and other new developments in education and psychology was excellent. I would however like to add one "credit where credit is due" footnote. Many of the techniques set forth in the article were originally invented by Dr. Jacob Moreno, who is still functioning vigorously and probably still inventing new techniques and ideas.

Abraham H Maslow

Waltham, Mass.

August 2, 1968

Maslow certainly emphasized the point that group trainers have absorbed Moreno's techniques and concepts and that separating ideas from the parent hinders the developing group movement. Eric Berne, founder of transactional analysis, also noted, "[Fritz] Perls, founder of the gestalt movement, shared with other 'active' psychotherapists the Moreno problem: the fact that nearly all known 'active' techniques were first tried out by Moreno in psychodrama, so that it makes it difficult to come up with an original idea in this regard" (1970, p. 164).

In further support of this statement, Siroka et al. (1971) emphasize that the majority of "sensitivity trainers," perhaps unaware of the historical development of the group movement, implemented Morenean psychodramatic group techniques as part of their basic repertoire. This may have been understandable (at the time), according to J. L. Moreno and Moreno (1970), Gottschalk and Pattison (1969), Siroka et al. (1971), and Treadwell and Treadwell (1972), because many of the most important names in sensitivity training were at one time students or observers of Moreno. This list includes Kurt Lewin, Warren Bennis, Ronald Lippitt, Rosemary Lippitt, Edgar Borgatta, Kenneth Benne, Jack Gibb, and Leland Bradford, some of the original founders of the National Training Laboratories (NTL). However, this author questions this attitude of understanding, because it is this type of attitudinal framework that perpetuates mistrust and

ambiguities in the field of group psychotherapy and group psychology. I am in firm agreement with Maslow's position that one give "credit where credit is due"; Moreno should not be just one more man to be discovered posthumously, but unfortunately this is the case.

KURT LEWIN: EMERGENCE OF THE BETHEL LABORATORIES

An important figure in developing the group movement was Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), who followed shortly after Moreno. Lewin, a trainee of Moreno, further developed the sociometric concept and concentrated on the dynamic of group structure, group ideology, conflicts between and within groups, various types of spontaneous group substructuring, the stability of a variety of spontaneous group structures versus structures created by external authority, minority problems, renegades, the scapegoat, and double loyalty conflict (Lewin & Lippitt, 1938).

Lewin's acquaintance with and enthusiasm for sociometry and the work of J. L. Moreno (1953a) carried out in Europe, especially *das Stegreiftheater* and *Who Shall Survive?*, along with his devoted interest in group or action dynamics was further enhanced after he met with Moreno several times in 1935. Furthermore, Lippitt (1947) examined Lewin's publications prior to his meetings with Moreno. They did not concentrate on group or action dynamics; rather, Lewin was known for his work in gestalt and topological psychology. However, Lewin and Lippitt (1938) published Lewin's first publication—"Techniques to investigate 'democracy' and 'autocracy' as group atmospheres," dealing with group therapy, action theory, and methodology—in the *Journals of Moreno Institute* in 1936

J. L. Moreno (1953a) reported that during their meetings, Lewin "expressed in our talks particular interest in the democratic structure of groups, in contrast to their *laissez faire* and authoritative structure, problems with which I experimented at that time" (p. ci). Additionally, Sorokin stated, "The initial impetus to the study of small groups was given by Moreno's theory of the social atoms and his 'Sociometry,' followed by Kurt Lewin's studies of small groups" (1966, p. 82). Furthermore, Sherif (1968) reported in his article "Integrating Field Work and Laboratory in Small Group Research" that the various psychological "trait" theories or personality typologies were extremely inadequate in explaining social relations.

When Moreno's work appeared in this country in the mid-thirties, presenting his sociometric technique for the study of interpersonal choices and reciprocities among individuals (i.e., role relations), it quickly found wide applications. A few years later, Kurt Lewin and his associates demonstrated the weighty determination of individual behavior by the properties of group atmosphere. *This line of experimentation was the basis of other subsequent studies coming from the proponents of the Group Dynamics School* (Sherif, 1968, p. 374, italics mine).

Thus Lewin, a proponent of the group dynamics school, is usually credited with developing the first T-group (training group) at a 1946 summer training

conference of community leaders at State Teachers College in New Britain, Connecticut. The result of this training conference, reported by Benne (1964), opened new avenues for research and prompted the establishment of the NTL the following summer in Bethel, Maine, to further develop and understand the T-group process as an unstructured group.

Moreno's response (1952, 1953a) to the opening of the NTL was: "My pioneering status in this field was already established and so I became the model for his first efforts in this, for him, a new direction of research" (pp. ci, 364).

THE INITIAL GROUP TRAINING CENTERS

During the 1930s and 1940s there were two private organizations (Benne, 1964; J. L. Moreno & Moreno, 1970) devoted to the teaching and training of group leaders: the Sociometric-Psychodramatic Institutes in Beacon, New York, and New York City, founded in 1937; and the NTL in Bethel, Maine, founded in 1947. After their inception, training and growth centers rapidly emerged and spread throughout the world. The group movement's breadth was so vast and varied that no one to my knowledge was able to compile a complete directory of training or growth centers. In the spring of 1971, *The Personnel and Guidance Journal* devoted a special issue to the growth of the group movement, designed particularly for the practitioner. The primary purpose, according to Kirby (1971), was to foster a clearer understanding of the multiplicity of group procedures. A partial fulfillment of that goal was the inclusion of a selected list of institutes where one could receive training in group work (Long, 1971). Unfortunately, the list was neither exhaustive (60 training centers) nor completely accurate; however, it did illustrate the extent to which the group-psychotherapy and group-psychology movement gained attention and was being received professionally in a positive light.

In discussing the initial training centers, Gottschalk and Pattison (1969) point out a definite correlation between the Morenean psychodramatic techniques and sociometric methodologies with that of the laboratory training concepts used by the NTL (J. L. Moreno, 1969). They also indicate that the founders of the NTL had their initial training in sociometry and psychodrama:

The direct development of the training laboratory came from the collaboration of three men: Leland Bradford, Ronald Lippitt and Kenneth Benne. All three had an educational background in psychology, experience in working with community and educational projects dealing with major social problems related to human relations. They had been students at the Moreno institute and influenced by J. L. Moreno's methods of psychodrama and sociometry and had experimented with various role-playing procedures in community educational projects directed toward effecting social change. (Gottschalk & Pattison, 1969, p. 138)

Furthermore, Kenneth Benne (a founder of the NTL) and Bozidar Muntyan (1951) credit Moreno as the pioneer of the action and group-research movement. They write:

The editors make special acknowledgement to Dr. J. L. Moreno, who has pioneered in the areas currently referred to as psychodrama, sociodrama, role-playing, action dynamics, warming-up technique, group psychotherapy and sociometry, and who first introduced these terms into the literature, with some of the meaning emphasized in the present volume. To a great extent, the basic impetus for certain new trends in group and action research can be traced to the work of Moreno and his numerous associates. (Benne & Muntyan, 1951, p. 101)

Moreno's influence upon the early NTL leaders (Ruitenbeek, 1970) is indeed very clear, as they were exposed to and influenced by his methods. Bradford, Lippitt, and Benne published their articles focusing on group and action methods between 1936 and 1953 in the journals of the Moreno Institute: *The Sociometric Review*, *Sociometry*, *Sociatry*, and *Group Psychotherapy*. More importantly, Moreno's voluminous contributions affected and inspired not only the group psychotherapy and group psychology movement in general, but also education, industry, mental health, hospitals, and government agencies. Moreno is held in the very highest esteem by many and considered a controversial and mystical figure by others. He is best summed up by Weiner's description of his pioneering ventures:

He creates before our eyes. What is disturbing is that he has not one style of creation and he has a balance of logic of his own. Therefore, Moreno is not always understood. A vital component to Moreno is his acceptance and love of children who he feels holds the key to survival and the future. (1968, p. 147)

Nevertheless, Moreno has been accepted as a pioneer in group psychotherapy and group psychology, with his theories and methodologies held as signal contributions. Although he was initially considered a contentious figure, Moreno was well aware of this dilemma, according to Weiner (1968), when he said, "There is no controversy about my ideas, they are universally accepted. I am the controversy" (p. cvii).

Although over the last 40 years the confusion that lingered among group leaders permeated the group psychotherapy and group psychology movement, hard work has enlightened and brought to the forefront effective ethical guidelines that have increased the effectiveness of group psychotherapy and group psychology (J. L. Moreno, 1962). Moreno foresaw many of the benefits of group work at a time when clinical practice was almost entirely one-on-one. Even though the disciplines of psychiatry, psychology, and mental health disciplines continue to heavily emphasize individual treatment, Burlingame, Strauss, and Joyce (2013) have demonstrated that there is now sufficient data showing group therapy to be as efficient or effective as individual therapy.

SUMMARY

Although almost a century old, group psychotherapy and group psychology have experienced an unprecedented expansion over the last 60 years and more. It must

be recalled that in 1942, Moreno founded the first professional association devoted to group psychotherapy, the American Society for Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama, and in 1945 he developed his second journal, *Sociatry* (renamed *Group Psychotherapy* 2 years later), which became the official professional organ of the association. In 1973 Moreno helped found the International Association of Group Psychotherapy (<http://www.iagp.com>), which involves many psychodramatists, group analysts, and practitioners of other approaches.

By the 1970s, human helping groups had found application in virtually all the human services, including the media. The growth of professional organizations for group-work specialists was accompanied by a burgeoning literature and accelerated research endeavors. Today, group psychology and group psychotherapy are viewed from an evidence-based standpoint exploring both strengths and weaknesses to achieve greater well-being and functioning within groups. This was one of Moreno's objectives: the scientific evaluation of group therapy.

J. L. Moreno's fundamental and pioneering contributions to the development of group psychotherapy and group psychology are well established. He undeniably is the father of psychodrama and sociometry and the pioneer of the group-encounter movement. As the pioneer of the movement, he coined the very term *encounter*, along with *sensitivity training*, and ushered in the humanistic psychological movement some 40 years later (Maslow, 1971). As pioneers in other fields, Corsini (1955) and Biddle and Thomas (1966) credit Moreno as one of the founders of group psychotherapy, and Compennolle (1981) recognizes him as a pioneer of marital therapy, family therapy, and network therapy. His sociometry is classic, and his sociograms are frequently considered the first examples of virtual social network analysis, precursors of our current web-based social media platforms fostering computer-generated rather than face-to-face interaction—Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, YouTube, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Snapchat, and Google, to name only a few.

Moreno is to be remembered, as his tombstone aptly reads, as “the man who brought joy and laughter back into psychiatry” (Blatner, 2000, p. 23).

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