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THE SPECTROGRAM IN PSYCHODRAMA*

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The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the use of a technique, called' the spectrogram, in the psychodramatic approach to group therapy. The spectrogram is both diagnostic and therapeutic. It clarifies issues, makes abstract issues concrete, and forces the participation and commitment of usually nonverbal members. It is particularly useful as one method of warming up a psychodrama group.

Construction of Spectrograms

Most commonly, a spectrogram is developed spontaneously from the initial non-directed discussion at the start of a psychodrama group meeting. On the basis of comments made (Le., "I'm the logical type, you are the emotional type") or on the basis of an underlying feeling tone in the group (La., how close the members of the group feel to each other—distant or close) the director (or others) may suggest a spectrogram. The group (or director) then defines the two poles, or ends, of the spectrum. Each group member will define the two ends somewhat differently. Since it is very hard, if not impossible, to get a precise consensual group definition of the poles, the way each member places himself between the poles and among the other group members yields a great deal of information. In the presence of this ambiguity a certain amount of projection occurs, providing both the group and the director with insights into each member's private logic. Once the poles have been defined to the satisfaction of the group, each member is asked to place himself at some point between the two poles. Since all members are required to place themselves in a straight line between the poles, they must also place themselves in relation to each other. An added dimension may be added by having the members face one pole or the other, denoting real or desired movement. Ambivalence may be shown by allowing a member to move back and forth over a certain self-selected portion of the spectrum. After all members (including the director at times) have placed themselves, they are asked to state why they placed themselves where they did. Doubling, mirroring, and other therapeutic techniques could be incorporated into the spectrogram at any time.

Thus, the basic spectrogram, just described, defines a straight line in very concrete, explicit terms. Whatever the issue being spectrogramed, it is taken from the vague and the abstract to specific, personal terms in a way which is quite unique. Another important feature of this technique is the fact that everyone in the group must participate, and as each member makes his contribution by defining his point on the line of the spectrogram he is adding to the group understanding and is becoming personally involved. This technique makes it very difficult for any one or two people to monopolize the group's time and attention.

Once the basic spectrogram is formed and each member has defined his position, the meeting may go in several directions. The group may shift to another spectrogram. (1) As

each member has spoken he has defined the poles of the spectrum more clearly. On the basis of this additional information on group attitudes and individual differences, the members may be allowed to shift positions on the spectrum to represent their places more in accord with group definition of the scale. (2) Members may shift to the place on the spectrum where they wish they were (ideal-self). This can also be shown by having the members face the pole they wish to go toward, although this does not show how far they wish to go. (3) Each member may be shifted on the basis of where others see him (other-self concept). At times one individual may be asked to position the others as he perceives them. This may be used if the director wishes to clarify or work with that individual's perceptions of the group. (4) Members may be given feedback from the group by being shifted on the spectrum by a consensus of the other members, in another variation of this technique. This is a particularly valuable shift. For example, when a patient sees himself at one pole and the group places him at the opposite pole, he is clearly distorting his perception of himself. This is a dramatic and effective form of confrontation and is generally well accepted since it comes from the other group members and not from the staff. While useful with most patients, informative feedback from the group members is particularly effective with adolescents, who frequently place the staff in the role of parents. (5) A shift may be made on the basis of imagined time gaps; i.e., before and after treatment. In each of these five shifts, the basic definition of the poles remains unchanged. It is possible to define new poles and go on to other unrelated spectrograms. In each case individuals making a move for themselves or for others are asked to describe why the move was made and what their new position means.

A spectrogram may be used as a take-off point for a general discussion of some issue, some individual or group problem which has been brought into focus by the spectrogram.

A spectrogram often leads directly into a psychodramatic scene. Several examples will be given to portray this transition. However, before these examples are given, further consideration of the definition of poles must be made.

The number of variations possible in spectrograms depends only on the ingenuity of the director and of the group. A spectrogram may be based on individual variables or group characteristics. Each member may be asked to place himself on a spectrum with introversion at one pole and extroversion at the other pole, between being prejudiced or not prejudiced, between feeling confident or afraid, between being generally verbal or generally nonverbal, between volatile or even-tempered, or between making decisions logically or by intuition and emotion. In each case the definition can be left general and vague or narrowed down to a specific problem, location, or situation. For example, the spectrum on degree of prejudice could be narrowly defined to "Would you want a Negro as a next door neighbor—without reservations as one pole and under no circumstances as the other pole," or this spectrum could be left at the abstract, projective level of "prejudiced" or "not prejudiced." A spectrogram may be used to clarify members' attitudes toward the group. One pole may be defined as "finding the group useful" and the other pole may be defined as "finding the group useless or detrimental." A spectrum may demonstrate and make concrete the amount of cohesion in the group, with those who feel close to other members at one pole and those who feel distant from other members at

the other pole. The spectrogram may demonstrate the isolation of one person from the group if he places himself (or is placed by the group) at some distance from the majority of the group members on the spectrum. Attitudes toward the director can also be expressed through a spectrogram; i.e., satisfied with or like strongly at one pole to angry with, hate, or dislike at the other pole.

Several examples of the development of spectrograms, the location of problems within the spectrogram, and the subsequent development of psychodramatic scenes will be presented.

Example 1

Mr. and Mrs. X arrived at a family psychodrama session (consisting of four couples and their teen-aged children) still angry with each other. They had had an argument about which route they should have taken from their home to the hospital that evening for the meeting. In a careful, step-by-step, logical manner Mr. X explained to the group why his way was best. Very frustrated, Mrs. X replied that Mr. X sounded so logical, but that she was ante her way was quicker because she had gone the other way many times. Mr X replied, "Why do you have to be so emotional? Why can't you be logical like me?" The director then set up a spectrogram with those individuals who felt they reacted "logically" toward one pole and those who reacted "emotionally" toward the other pole. As Mr. X expounded at length on his logic, two members of the group (a nurse and Mr. Y) who had originally placed themselves near Mr. X and near the "logic" pole suddenly got up and moved half way across the room toward the "emotional" pole. This was a rude shock to Mr. X, whose family had been telling him "your logic pushes us away from you." Miss X (the daughter and identified patient) then described a family situation where this occurred. This was portrayed psychodramatically with family members moving away from Mr. X any time lie began using his "logic." Behind his "logic" was an apparent-self-righteous attitude of "I'm always right and I can prove it if you will just listen." This -*as a major turning point in the therapy of Mr. X.

Example 2

The initial discussion of a ward psychodrama meeting was dominated by two or three young sociopaths. The group was asked to forma spectrogram ,with those members who felt they were usually comfortable talking in groups toward one pole and those who were quite uncomfortable talking in groups toward the other pole. No patients placed themselves in the middle. A large duster crowded near the "uncomfortable" end and a smaller cluster, including the young sociopaths, placed themselves near the other end. Each cluster was formed into a circle and asked, in turn, to talk among themselves about the other group. Without the former leaders, the formerly silent group was as active as the "comfortable in groups" group. A discussion of the difficulty each group hid in dealing with the other followed.

Example 3

The topic of family finances came up one evening in the family psychodrama group. Who should pay the bills, the husband or the wife? A spectrogram was set up. Three of the four couples in the group placed themselves near their spouses somewhere on the spectrum. Mr. Y placed himself near the "husbands should handle the bills" end and Mrs. Y placed herself near the "wives should handle the bills" end. The Y's son and daughter placed themselves near their father. The group decided to focus on the Y family and their apparent conflict over who handles the money. A scene was set up with the mother, who was domineering and over-controlling, facing the coalition of husband, son, and daughter. Mother was placed standing on a chair, since the group saw her as putting herself above her family. Doubles, mirroring, and models were used to increase Mrs. Y's insight into the role she played in the family.

Example 4

In the fourth of a series of psychodrama sessions with a mixed, unrelated group, the director used a spectrogram as a warm-up. He asked the patients and auxiliaries (nurses and aides) to form a spectrogram based on whether they felt a part of the group or not. One aide and one patient placed themselves near the "don't feel part" pole. Everyone else placed himself on the other side of center, toward the "do feel part of the group" pole. The aide and the patient were asked to do soliloquies. The aide, a new staff member in his first psychodrama meeting, expressed doubt about the techniques and fear that he would not be able to participate well and become a group member. The patient, with the help of a double, expressed the feeling that something blocked him from becoming a part of any group, that he always finds himself a detached observer on the sidelines. A scene developed where an auxiliary became the "block" that prevented him from joining the group. It was found that the patient constructed his own "block" and did not really try to enter the group. The session ended with ego-building for this patient.

Example 5

The group was asked to spectrogram their ability to express anger. Several patients went immediately to the pole defined as "inability to express anger." When one or two staff members began to move in this direction, the rest of the group insisted that the staff members remain in the center, the normal or neutral position. The staff members were comfortable enough to admit to some difficulties in expressing anger, but the patients insisted upon viewing the staff as "normal." This then led to a very important discussion of patient-staff relationships and what the patients expect of the staff.

Example 6

During an early session of an intensive in-service training program (sensitivity group) with staff at a state mental hospital, the director of the workshop requested the group to form a spectrogram based on whether the goal expected from the workshop was "self-awareness" or "psycho-dramatic techniques." (Psychodrama was the major method used throughout the workshop.) The group contained a doctor, nurses, and aides from the same unit of the hospital. Most of the group members were quite guarded and evasive at the start of this workshop. Some members did not want to become involved. Faced with this

resistance, the director utilized the spectrogram to compare the goals of the group members with his own, and to locate areas and causes of resistance and hostility. The entire group aligned themselves between the middle of the spectrum and the "self-awareness" pole. The director also placed himself near the "self-awareness" pole. The doctor and a few others in the group placed themselves near the center of the spectrum, although still closer to the "self-awareness" pole than to the "techniques" pole. They expressed the desire to learn techniques that they could apply to the patients on the wards.

Everyone expressed the view that they could deal better with the patients if they understood themselves better. Many recognized that their own emotions and reactions sometimes interfered with their work. Several group members expressed hostility toward the director for "Playing around" and "not getting down to business." (The director had been using spontaneity tests and group projective techniques to warm up the group.) Others expressed doubt as to the worth of the workshop. Still others expressed doubt that they would be able to participate enough, to be spontaneous and open enough to get anything out of the sensitivity training or to contribute to the group. Thus, this spectrogram helped the group warm up for more personal material later. It gave the director some indication of how fast to proceed. It helped the director locate the individuals most resistant to participation in the workshop, to identify their fears and anxieties. It also helped identify those individuals who were ready for deeper involvement. Therapeutically, the group shared their fears of self-exposure, took another step toward working together as a group rather than as a number of individuals, and developed some understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Example 7

The author has utilized psychodrama in the training of lay counselors for wilderness trail camping. with institutionalized juvenile delinquents. About one-half of this group of lay counselors had had prior experience in camping with juvenile delinquents; the other half had not. To the author's knowledge, none had had prior experience with a psychiatrist or psychodrama.

The first training session started slowly. The group members were obviously uneasy, both about the training session and about the trail camps. After a brief introduction and demonstration of psychodramatic techniques, the author (director), as a warm-up, formed a spectrogram from one pole for those individuals who were frightened and felt incompetent to handle the delinquents on the trail to the other pole for individuals who felt competent and self-assured, capable of dealing with whatever situations might arise along the trail. People tended to pile up near the "feel fearful and incompetent" pole. No one placed himself near the "feel competent and self-assured" pole. Generally the experienced counselors expressed more confidence in their abilities than the inexperienced, but there were two experienced counselors who placed themselves at the "feel fearful and incompetent" pole and who told of experiences on prior camping trips which they felt they had not handled adequately. The trail leaders of the organization (Youth Adventures of Oregon) sponsoring the camping trips also acknowledged that they had faced situations with the delinquents in which they felt inadequate and still feel

inadequate.

A general discussion of their shared sense of inadequacy followed. This led to a scene where one of the experienced but fearful counselors, mentioned above, portrayed herself in a situation with a group of delinquent girls where she temporarily lost control of the group, re-creating an incident which had happened the preceding summer. The trail director (not the psychodrama director) then took the role of the counselor in the same situation, acting as a model. He dealt with the incident in an efficient manner, maintaining control of the girls. The first counselor then replayed the scene, utilizing the approach demonstrated by the trail director, this time controlling the group much better. The training group supported the frightened and chagrined counselor, expressing their doubts that they could have handled this situation. Many expressed an awareness of their difficulty in being firm, and the necessity of firmness when dealing with delinquents. Confidence in the trail director was apparent.

Thus, the spectrogram in this situation served to involve the entire group. It helped warm them up to a meaningful topic, i.e., how to maintain control of a group of delinquents on the trail. It was diagnostic in the sense that it helped locate individual and group fears and deficiencies. It led directly into an educational demonstration of how (and how not) to be firm with delinquents. As a side benefit, it gave several individuals insight into their relationships with their own children, their need to be liked and their difficulty in being firm and consistent.

Discussion

As these examples have demonstrated, the director may use a spectrogram for a variety of reasons. He may use a spectrogram to define his role, attitudes, or goals. He may use it to define the relationship of the group to himself. He may feel uncertain of the group processes present, in which case he may have the group define and form a spectrogram to make these processes more explicit and concrete. For the same reasons, the director may use a spectrogram when the group is rambling, staying at an abstract level, or otherwise evading direct confrontation with their feelings. The director may be aware of the Major problem in the group but feel that the group needs further warm-up before attacking the problem directly. The spectrogram is useful in this situation, since it involves the whole group, focuses their attention, yet remains at some distance from individual problems. The director may use a spectrogram to highlight defense mechanisms or areas of conflict of selected members of the group. He may use it to spread information and to provide feedback to group members, to give individuals insight to how the group sees them and reacts to them.

The spectrogram may be a particularly relevant tool for therapy with people raised in the American culture. This bipolar way of analyzing events is consistent with the American tendency to see things as opposites-in black and white. The literature of the social sciences, as well as much of our popular literature, is full of bipolar concepts, i.e., introversion-extroversion, dominance-submission, sympathy-antipathy, capitalist-communist, "dove" or "hawk," etc. The spectrogram utilizes a manner of thinking with

which most members of this culture are comfortable and familiar. It shares the advantages and disadvantages inherent in this pattern of thought. The use of dichotomies allows us to make distinctions which are important. They bring order to our thinking and make diverse events understandable.

Since polarization produces high order abstractions, distortions inevitably occur. Rarely does one find a pure form of an extrovert, capitalist, or whatever the concept may be. Moreover, such black-and-white thinking is a major factor in prejudice and mental illness. It tends to prevent people from recognizing the many distinguishing features of individuals, the multiple causation of events, or the alternate modes of action available.

While the spectrogram does not allow for the portrayal of a third or fourth pole or variable, it does require the group members to look closely at the gradations between poles on one dimension, at the movement occurring between poles, and the many variables utilized by different individuals to define any position on a continuum. Thus, within the framework of familiar bipolar concepts, the spectrogram graphically demonstrates the inherent weakness of this form of thinking. In the process, it makes the group members more comfortable with shades of gray. It helps break down their stereotypes and assists them in seeing the uniqueness of individuals.

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