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The SURVIVAL through online Sociodrama: Covid19, what do you want to tell me?

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The SURVIVAL through online Sociodrama: Covid19, what do you want to tell me?

A Sobre VIVÊNCIA via Sociodrama online: Covid19, o que você quer me dizer?

La SUPERVIVENCIA a través de Sociodrama en línea: Covid19, ¿qué quieres decirme?

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Abstract

This article presents an account of an online Sociodrama experience. The described session took place in the context of a study group, containing 36 participants, including psychology students and psychologists. The meeting took place through an online tool that allows video conferencing (Zoom). The proposed theme was: "Covid19, what do you want to tell me?". It is an action research with a socio-therapeutic focus, in which the direction of the session was centered on collective creation. The instruments used were the director, the scenario, the protagonist, the supporting role and the public. It was noticed that the online Sociodrama creates spaces for the reorganization of social roles, affected in times of crisis, to happen even in times of social isolation.

Keywords: sociodrama, cyberspace, coronavirus.

Resumo

Este trabalho apresenta um relato de experiência de um sociodrama online. A sessão descrita se deu no contexto de um grupo de estudos, contendo 36 participantes, entre alunos de psicologia e psicólogos. O encontro ocorreu por meio de uma ferramenta online que permite videoconferência (Zoom). O tema proposto foi: "Covid19, o que você quer me dizer?". Trata-se de uma pesquisa-ação com foco socioterápico, na qual a direção da sessão foi centrada na criação coletiva. Os instrumentos utilizados foram diretor, cenário, protagonista, coadjuvante e público. Percebeu-se que o sociodrama online cria espaços para que a reorganização dos papéis sociais, afetados em momentos de crise, aconteça mesmo em tempos de isolamento social.

Palavras-chave: sociodrama, ciberespaço, coronavírus.

Resumen

Este trabajo presenta un informe de experiencia de un sociodrama en línea. La sesión descrita tuvo lugar en el contexto de un grupo de estudio, con 36 participantes, incluidos estudiantes de psicología y psicólogos. La reunión se realizó a través de una herramienta en línea que permite la videoconferencia (Zoom). El tema propuesto fue: "Covid19, ¿qué quieres decirme?". Es una investigación de acción con un enfoque socio-terapéutico, en el que la dirección de la sesión se centró en la creación colectiva. Los instrumentos utilizados fueron director, escenario, protagonista, secundario y público. Se observó que el sociodrama en línea crea espacios para la reorganización de los roles sociales, afectados en tiempos de crisis, incluso en tiempos de aislamiento social.

Palabras-clave: sociodrama, ciberespacio, coronavirus.

INTRODUCTION

Sociometry offers the opportunity to observe, among other aspects, social roles, sociocultural learning, collective affect, social conflicts, and identity processes. This science uses a sociometric tool: Sociodrama. Sociodrama deals with group issues rather than personal issues. It is used both as a research method and in the treatment of groups and intergroup relationships (Castro, Cardoso, & Leandro, 2020; Nery, 2012). Moreno characterized Sociodrama as “a deep action method dealing with intergroup relations and collective ideologies”. (1994, p. 188).

Sociodrama takes place in the here and now. The actors are present in the moment and the scene consists of the participants' interactions among themselves. Nery (2010) explains that a Sociodrama works on intergroup relationships with a focus on how social roles are played and what objectives and conflicts the group has in common.

Groups which had been socialmetrically united or separated due to bond choices and geographic distances do not need, today, physical proximity to exist (Malaquias, 2012). Today, with just a few clicks one can get to know different countries, different cultures, and even get in touch with people who live thousands of miles away. Such facts are part of Cyberculture which is, according to Lévy (1999), a set of techniques, practices, attitudes, and new ways of thinking and values which have simultaneously emerged from a global computer network (cyberspace). Our society, dubbed “the information society”, sees Information and Communications Technology (ICT) as the main source of gathering and sharing information. Therefore, participating and being part of it has turned out to be a way of keeping bonds (Goulart et al., 2013; Nunes, 2017).

Individuals need group interaction, whether online or in person, due to ideological or survival instincts. However, there are people who still use lack of time as an excuse for not meeting one another, demonstrating how afraid or how much they would like to belong to some of these groups (Malaquias, 2012).

Online Sociodrama emerges in this context, as social media is, in Moreno's perspective, “an instrument through which the living and the creative genius can, on this planet, communicate directly and instantaneously with his fellow human beings” (1993, p. 482-483). Thus, online Sociodrama would be a way to socialize in a healthy way during times of physical isolation.

The online Sociodrama method follows the steps of a sociometric session which help interpret group phenomena and take three contexts into account: the social context, which refers to the culture which individuals belong to, i.e., the real environment; the group context, which comprises of the group participants, the director and the auxiliary egos; and the dramatic context, which refers to the dramatization itself and is the “what if” space where participants play different roles which allow them to act out their fantasies in the imaginary, in order to generate new answers via surplus reality (Malaquias, 2012).

Surplus reality becomes even more relevant in the online Sociodrama context because, as Perazzo (2012) highlights, surplus reality allows transformations in the scene to occur and allows for the coconstruction of an alternative reality which fills in the group needs.

Therefore, the goal of online Sociodrama is to discuss the possibility of maintaining the health of the group via videoconferencing tools and online chats, which may allow identification, connection and the discussion of social phenomena. A thematic Sociodrama concerning “Coronavirus – Covid-19” has been used to illustrate this article. The theme choice has to do with the 2020 pandemic Brazil is going through and the national quarantine, which is a preventive health measure suggested by the Ministry of Health, leading to social distancing. Social isolation calls for the search of new socionomic experiences for the SURVIVAL in groups.

METHOD

The article describes an experimental online Sociodrama session, themed “COVID-19, what do you want to tell me?” The session lasted one hour and a half and took place in March 2020. A group of thirty six people,

members of a Psychodrama study group comprised of psychologists and Psychology students (over eighteen years old), were invited through social media and participated in the session. The participants connected themselves via audio and video using a videoconferencing online platform called “Zoom”. Encryption ensured data security and protected privacy.

Since the session was designed as action based research on Sociodrama, the direction strategy chosen was centered on collective creation with a focus on Sociodrama aiming at overcoming difficulties. The method used was Sociodrama and the chosen tool was dramatization. Lastly, the instruments used were the director, the setting (both real and symbolic), the protagonist, the supporting role (including auxiliary ego and audience ego), and the public (Rodrigues, 2007).

THE ONLINE SURVIVAL:

Non-specific warm-up: entering the chatroom

As participants entered the chat room and joined the online group via videoconferencing, a question was posed: “how to conduct an online Sociodrama?”. As various discussions developed, the director chose to ask each participant to think of a word that would describe their first contact with the psychodramatic method. The answers involved words like involvement, spontaneity, teachers’ names, Moreno, college names and so on. Some of the participants typed the words in the chat and the director read them out loud. This exchange took place while other participants were entering the chatroom and connecting themselves to the “Zoom” platform, warming-up the group, and, at the same time, allowing time for everyone to join in so that the session could proceed.

This phase of the session refers to what Knobel (2012) calls the isolation moment, in which each participant tends to become more introspective and observing just waiting to understand the group experience and what his or her role in the group is. The director’s desirable skills become even more relevant in an online Sociodrama. Such skills, according to Knobel (2012) are: firm and relaxed, active and patient, in order to maintain the group atmosphere and promote acceptance, which favor creativity and spontaneity. In this manner, the director mediated the session during the warm-up, saying the participants’ names, asking them to connect to the here and now by turning off devices and muting their microphones, when necessary, so that they could listen to one another. Acknowledging a sense of belonging generates sociometric proximity, especially in an online context, where one must first know where they are and who they are, so that they may recognize themselves as part of the online group, i.e., creating a place for the group in the surplus reality.

In discussing this portion of the session, Nery (2012, p. 101) states: “the group warm-up happens gradually as the functional unit uses physical and mental starters”. The warming-up process begins non-specific and intensifies as the starters are used, once the warm-up is a gradual process.

Specific warm-up: building up my profile

The director briefly explained the group’s proposal as well as the sociodramatic method, distinguishing it from psychotherapeutic Psychodrama and clarified some of the participants’ doubts. As it was a thematic Sociodrama, the director started the specific warm-up asking the group to close their eyes and to imagine the Coronavirus, trying to stimulate materialization: “*If it had a color, what would it be? If it had a shape, what would it be like? What would it smell like?*”. Next, the director asked the participants what the Coronavirus intended to do on Earth. After a while, the director told the group that when they opened their eyes, they would be the virus. Then, the director asked them to share their perceptions, introducing themselves to each other as the Coronavirus. The director then said: “*I am the Coronavirus and I am here because I would like Jane Doe to spend a little more time with her parents.*” Next, the participants started sharing their own perceptions.

A character creation which represents the group conflict becomes necessary so that the group can start a horizontal movement to recognize its members and their sociometric bonds. In the same way, Nery (2012), emphasizes that after the warm-up for the theme/conflict, the director may introduce the auxiliary egos as theme

related characters so that the other group members can talk, come up with new characters or interact with them, helping the group to warm up for the theme and creating an opportunity for cocreation.

Another main goal of a warm-up “is the preparation for the encounter and the participants’ motivation to talk, to reflect, to imagine and to act upon a problem” (Nery, 2012, p. 101). Even in the online environment, the management of the warm-up is possible through some resources such as gestures, music, images, pictures, dramatic games, characters and etc.

In the online Sociodrama, the director should be more alert and encourage group members to participate, as they may all talk at the same time. In addition, the director should be ready to mediate a session via chat, especially when one member or another asks to speak and wants to communicate with the character directly. Participants, then, start saying things like: *“I am here to bring Jane Doe closer to her family”*, *“I have come to kill everyone”*, *“I am here to remind you of sympathy”* and *“I have come to bring changes”*.

As such, just like the traumas caused by natural disasters, studied by Zampieri (2019), a pandemic is a disruptive environment because it provokes isolation and it may bring different consequences to each person, bringing about feelings in an individual like weirdness, hostility, uncertainty, disorientation, disorganization, among other sensations. These feelings may lead individuals to take impulsive, unpredictable and unfit attitudes with no planning. That’s why they must be treated.

After the group sharing, the director listed the main issues that had come up (writing them on chat as well), namely: 1. The Coronavirus of social support; 2. The Coronavirus that came to bring changes; 3. The Coronavirus that came to encourage sympathy; 4. The Coronavirus that wants to kill everyone; and, 5. The Coronavirus that makes me look inside myself.

In order to choose the drama which would represent the group, the director then asked the participants to vote in, via the available chat of the platform used, which Coronavirus they would like to talk to. The group choice was “The Coronavirus that brings changes”. This was the theme of the dramatization that followed.

Dramatization

Nery (2012, p. 98) states that “the dramatization and the use of action techniques are the result of the encounter; they are not an end in themselves, but only means for the group to create”. Thus, in the online environment it is often necessary to adapt or create new opportunities to maintain the warm-up and the surplus reality.

Next, the director explained to the participants that they would talk to the Coronavirus to clarify the issue directly with it. Therefore, the director herself took on the role of COVID-19 and questioned some participants randomly: “What do you want from me?”.

In this specific case, COVID-19, being a disease, is seen as a threat that can isolate, kill, etc. In this sense, just as Zampieri's (2019, n / p.) study with traumas in natural disasters, “threats can be integrated into everyday life and, thus, cease to be recognized as coming from the outside world and be internalized”. COVID-19 has brought social isolation and fear of contamination to those out on the streets. As a result, it brought about the risk of distorted individual perceptions. “And if people incorporate threats as part of their own subjectivity, they will shape their lives” (Zampieri, 2019, n / p.). Sociodrama allows opportunities for individuals to express spontaneity and creativity, despite the challenge caused by the pandemic.

In both online and in person Sociodrama, it is possible to create several small sequential dramatizations, produced by different people, that direct the theme until one of the characters highlights and confronts the group's central conflict (Knobel, 2012).

After two or three interpellations, the director asked if anyone else wanted to talk to the Coronavirus. The participants continued to raise issues based on the virus’ effect on their personal lives, and the director would

respond, sometimes playing the role of the virus, and sometimes in the role of a double of the participants themselves.

One of the participants said: “when things are working out for me, something always comes up to get in the way and now it's you”. Then, the director proposed a role reversal, asking this participant to take on the role of the Coronavirus. The director took over her previous role and repeated what she said. So the participant, in the role of the virus, needed to give a spontaneous response to her own apprehension.

Almost all the participants spoke up and most of them expressed that the virus came to make people take a closer look inside themselves and at people around them, and also to promote changes in humanity.

The virus was asked several questions, for which the director often proposed role reversal. At one point, the director even requested that a participant who had taken over the role of the Coronavirus remain in it, while another participant questioned her. That participant continued as an auxiliary ego for other interventions.

Approaching the end of the interventions, a participant expressed himself, saying: “I believe that the Coronavirus did not come to propose anything, each one of us gives it the meaning we want”. And yet another one said: “I don't care about you, I don't care, what bothers me are all the things you took away from me and prevented me from doing.”

After intervening with the last participants, the director proposed to the group to ask the Coronavirus questions, such as: “where are you from?”, “why did you show up now?” and “how long are you planning to stay?”. Next, the director asked the participants new questions: “where do you think I came from?”, leading them to seek the answers within themselves.

Human beings are quite unprepared to face moments of surprise, as they like to be in control. During moments of shock or surprise, things get out of control and they look for a rational way to deal with the situation, which in turn increases anxiety and decreases spontaneity. The word “spontaneity” comes from Latin *sua sponte*, which means “within itself, in agreement with itself”. Therefore, the human being needs to be “a double of himself”, to take spontaneous actions and to recognize himself in moments of crisis (Moreno, Blomkvist, & Rutzel, 2001, p. 49).

Sociodrama enables new responses, which can help the individual identify his emotional and collaborative potentials with his social groups. It can also strengthen hope for the future amid the protection of the group as well as external groups (family, society, religion, etc.), thus helping to maintain emotional health (Zampieri, 2019).

Sharing

Nery (2012, p. 98) states that “the basis of Sociodrama is the encounter” and that is why it is important that the director promote interaction, participation, and recognition in the other. For this recognition to occur, one of the most important steps is sharing.

Sharing is extremely related to cluster three, which according to Bustos (1990), is where we develop most of the roles of our adulthood, and where we learn to share. Sharing is nothing more than each individual contributing what he can to the common good. During an online Sociodrama, sharing is even more necessary because it is during sharing that the participants report their identification with others, enabling a feeling of protection. Therefore, sharing in Sociodrama can be the construction of a sense of “us”.

Once the dramatization was over, the director asked each participant to express with a hand gesture the way they intended to adapt to COVID-19. Examples of images were: hands clasped, hands extended apart, hands in movement of expulsion, hands closed, among others. Finally, the director asked the group to make a soliloquy of these images, all at the same time. Words such as “patience”, “resilience” and “respect” stood out.

Thus, through the online Sociodrama, the participants were able to recognize themselves in the face of chaos, allowing the maximum described by Moreno et al. (2001, p, 53) "we don't just affect each other, we affect each other" to be applied.

Finally, since this was a study group, the Sociodrama concluded with a theoretical processing, outlying the steps, techniques, and theoretical backgrounds used, as well as their support in psychodramatic theory.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Through this article it was possible to understand that the pandemic caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) brought about feelings, thoughts, situations, and sensations experienced in moments of crisis. Social isolation, a measure taken by most governments around the globe as a way of preventing the virus spread and promoting the flattening of the epidemiological curve, forces the strangeness of some social roles or a drastic change in their execution. Accordingly, the subjects who experience this moment are led to recognize themselves again in these social roles, returning to chaos, in order to reorganize themselves. The online Sociodrama presents itself as a tool that gives space for this reorganization to occur, so that the SURVIVAL of these roles occurs even in times of isolation.

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