

# Exploring the Development Prospects of Dramatherapy: A Study on the Family Therapy with the Satir Model as an Example

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**Abstract.** Based on the literature review, this article summarizes that there have been a few attempts at the use of dramatherapy in family therapy, which has the potential for redevelopment. On the other hand, the Satir Model, with its mature theory and extensive practice, has shown remarkable achievements in family therapy. According to the comparative study of existing research, dramatherapy complemented the Satir Model in terms of some theories and techniques. Therefore, this study aims to explore the possibility of combining dramatherapy with the Satir Model to treat family conflicts. In conclusion, novel and thoughtful methods based on the combination of dramatherapy and the Satir Model may be constructed to deal with family conflicts to encourage clients' involvement and to ensure their sense of security in expressing themselves freely, thereby achieving better healing effects and providing inspiration for the future application of dramatherapy and the Satir Model. This experiment also inspires the development of an independent and diverse theoretical system in the integration of dramatherapy with other healing theories and inspires the Satir Model to provide visitors with more space and create more opportunities for communication in future applications.

**Keywords:** Dramatherapy; Satir Model; Family therapy.

## 1. Introduction

Family conflicts have become an increasingly common phenomenon in recent years. Family is the basic cell of society and the first school of the young generation. The composition and operation of the family are not only one of the most significant contributing factors to the youngsters' growth but also serve as an integral element of social order. Family therapy has always been an important part of psychotherapy. Therefore, the impact of family conflicts cannot be underestimated, and educators, psychological practitioners, and social workers have been committed to seeking strategies to build a healthy internal environment within the family.

Family therapy originated in the United States, and the Satir Model created by Virginia Satir has now had a widespread impact worldwide. The Satir Model has a long history of theoretical evolution and has developed mature practical methods, which have been proven effective in family intervention. However, where there is still room for improvement lies in the main methods of the Satir Model and traditional psychological counseling — communication. Dramatherapy, on the other hand, excels in creative dramatic techniques and requires clients deeply involved in the workshop. With the expertise in the knowledge and approach in sociology, psychotherapy, and theatre performance, dramatherapy makes the healing process more flexible and inclusive compared to other approaches used in psychotherapy [1]. In this way, this article attempts to employ dramatherapy techniques and combine the concept of the Satir Model as a means of family therapy.

Dramatherapy has brand new vast vistas of future development. According to existing research, there have been attempts by therapists to provide dramatherapy with a whole family as the object, and some colleges and universities also have relevant experiential programs concerning students' psychological intervention. In addition, it can also be used to promote cohesion in lots of organizations. Based on the literature review, this article will sketch out a thread of the progress of dramatherapy and the Satir Model to date, as well as the potential for further development of their combination. Dramatherapeutic techniques will be adapted to a case study on Satir family therapy selected to

explore the development prospects of dramatherapy's application in family therapy combined with the Satir Model.

## 2. Overview

Drama, as an expressive arts therapy form, can be traced back to religion and witchcraft--a religious wizard profession called shaman [2]. In the early 1920s, Austrian psychiatrist Jacob Levi Moreno founded psychodrama, which had a significant impact on the birth of dramatherapy [3]. The first public use of the compound term "dramatherapy" was in a research report by British educator Peter Slade, marking the official formation of dramatherapy [4]. Subsequently, a group of pioneers in dramatherapy emerged in the UK and the US, such as Billy Lindkvist, Sue Emmy Jennings, etc. [5]. With the increasing demand for dramatherapy, Europe and America have begun to establish training systems and official management institutions in succession to regulate drama therapists' behavior.

In the past decade, the application of dramatherapy in family interventions has existed in embryos. Jessie Ellinor formed a family drama group consisting of four teenagers with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities(PMLD) from a school for adolescents in special need and their guardians, providing opportunities for these families to exchange their minds and rethink their identity in families [6]. Christian Dixon has been dedicated to the study of Family Dramatherapy (FDT) since 2015 and published a clinical comment on the impact of his LGBTQ+ identity in his family therapy work [7].

The Satir Model was established by the American family therapist Virginia Satir in the 1950s, and the most important concept of individual therapy in Satir is the basic triangle relationship—father, mother, and child—from which many of the learned experiences of clients with impairments originate [8]. Satir, adhering to the concept of people-oriented, has developed lots of therapeutic techniques in the practice of family therapy, such as meditations, communication stances, family stress balls, etc. [9].

The noteworthy goals of the Satir Model are to increase self-esteem and to promote acceptance, appreciation, and healthy communication within the family from multiple aspects such as communication gestures, family rules, and the family system [10]. Satir herself has compiled his theories and practices into several books, including *Conjoint Family Therapy*, *The Satir Model: Family Therapy and Beyond*, and *The New Peoplemaking*. Satir's friend Maria Gomori, one of the co-authors of *The Satir Model: Family Therapy and Beyond*, has been committed to the practice of the Satir Model and has provided a wealth of treatment cases. Nathan has also researched the Satir Model, summarizing Satir's Joint Family Theory into three parts: family theory, communication theory, and theory and practice of theory [11]. Recently, group psychological interventions based on the Satir Model have been widely applied because of their operability, controllability, short time, and efficiency [12].

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1. Feasibility

The conceptual basis for integrating the Satir Model into dramatherapy is based on a multidimensional consideration. From a methodological perspective, drama itself is a comprehensive art with strong inclusiveness. Dramatherapy is also widely applied in practice to various interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills, and to some extent, it can be seen as an interdisciplinary field of drama, theater research, and psychotherapy. The Satir Model is a type of strongly operational characteristic of psychotherapy, features high operability; From the perspective of the Satir Model, drama is also one of the main tools for its treatment. Its commonly used techniques such as pruning and parts parties contain certain dramatic elements, especially the latter, which can become a part of dramatherapy with slight adjustments.

As for conceptual models, one important aspect of family therapy is the understanding of the concepts of "home" and "human". Satir believes that an individual's internal system, native family system, and interpersonal interaction system are three different sets of operating systems, and they should be connected to bring better effectiveness. From her perspective, therapists play roles in modeling congruence. The three systems in the Satir Model can be associated with the three levels of dramatherapy. By illustrating stories with drama therapeutic work, dramatherapy can enhance people's autonomy and empathy at the micro level and promote relationships between service recipients at the meso level, which is particularly critical for family therapy. From a macro perspective, theatres can be seen as a microcosm of society. To sum up, dramatherapy and the Satir Model share common ideas, so the combination is theoretically feasible.

### **3.2. Innovative Treatment Methods**

Traditional psychotherapy was often carried out by counseling in previous cases. Satir's family therapy also relies on verbal expression. In addition, the integration of Satir's drama elements is also based on extensive and in-depth communication in the early stages.

Dramatherapy may be able to provide better services compared to communication. Firstly, dramatherapy allows for the use of metaphors and symbols to construct stories. Some embarrassing affairs like domestic violence and infidelity are usually hard to bring up out of consideration for family integrity or moral and legal factors. The adaptation of reality can subtly bypass or at least weaken the psychological defense mechanisms of clients, in case of deception and concealment from family resulting in a lack of fidelity in therapists' evaluation of clients' condition and may eventually affect the progress of treatment.

Secondly, the resonance between the audience and actors in dramatherapy can promote personal growth. Especially in homogeneous groups, members will have more or less similar experiences and mental problems. They project the conflicts they have suffered in reality into the drama, as well as their behavior patterns and ways of thinking, which can reflect the recurring problem patterns they encounter in real-life interactive situations. This can deepen their own and others' insights into each other's problems, provide support and comfort, and encourage their peers to reflect and make use of their natural ability to empathize. Drama is like a microcosm of reality, encouraging clients to try and make mistakes until they find a way to cope that suits them without harming others.

Drama is not just about words, body movements are better echoes of the heart, which can bring clients independent and profound self-reflection. In traditional treatment models, clients with limited academic degrees are likely to rely too much on the opinions of the therapist, adhering to the therapist's word and action as a rigid standard and exhibiting lower autonomy [13]. The client is not fully engaged, and coupled with the limited information available to the therapist, the treatment will inevitably have significant limitations that cannot be neglected. Drama can be deemed as a valuable social practice, promoting families in treatment to internalize the skills and attitudes learned in treatment into their own experiences and apply them to similar scenes in the real world without repeating the same mistakes.

## **4. Case Analysis**

Based on the analysis of the previous treatment models mentioned, this article will take Hou Aiqin's *"The Satir Family Therapy Model Involves a Case Study of Parent-Child Conflict in Adolescence"* as the blueprint, supplemented by the transformation of dramatherapy while retaining the concept of Satir Model [14]. This study is based on the Satir Model as the theoretical framework for the treatment course, and the sufficient intervention time laying the foundation for achieving satisfactory intervention effects. A comprehensive description of the results of the preliminary research has been provided, which has given this article a more accurate understanding of the relevant information of the clients.

The main task of the first stage in the case is to establish professional relationships and find out where the communication gap lies. In the original case, the researcher took the measure of directly asking clients the problems and methods they wanted to solve, and there was a dispute within the family during the treatment. Researchers say that venting emotions through argument is also a way of healing, but this is not the case. It is a dereliction of duty to expose clients' trauma without easing their pain. In the second stage, the original case used family sculpture to present rigid family rules, trying to intervene and reconstruct the benign communication mode. In addition to the structured treatment adopted by the researchers, the construction of family sculpture is also dominated by the researchers in this stage. However, the purpose of the family sculpture is to restore the daily communication mode of clients, so giving the clients initiative may better achieve the purpose. The original plan for the third stage involves having separate conversations with parents and adolescents, using iceberg theory to explore their inner selves, enhance their sense of self-worth, and encourage them to empathize with each other, ultimately sharing their gains and feelings. Parts Party technique was applied. In the fourth stage, the therapist invited clients' friends and relatives to play the characteristics that one of the clients wants to change, aiming to focus on a positive process of internal and interpersonal change and accessing one's resources. The problem here is that there are a large number of people invited to the party, most of whom are non-drama, psychology, social work, or education professionals. Therefore, people who are invited may not fully understand their roles, which can lead to the consequence that the treatment is bound to be dominated by therapists. In addition, the coordination of the conditions of numerous participants will also become a challenging task. In the fifth stage, the therapist establishes a supportive communication environment and further enhances family relations through temperature reading. At the last stage, the therapist learned that the main client was good at badminton, so a badminton match was arranged to further improve the client's self-worth and consolidate the progress that had been made. But neither the therapist nor the clients' action is recorded in the original case, which raises the question of whether this can be a kind of treatment.

For this part, techniques of dramatherapy will be applied to rearrange the original treatment process according to the objectives at different stages. For the first stage, which scene to present leave it up to clients to use their discretion. After the improvisation, the therapist validates what has been shown through mirroring, and tries to analyze everyone's psychological dynamics. Clients can stop the therapist at any time when they think the word or behavior is not in line with the facts and put right the performance. In the second stage, the technique of family sculpture in the original case is retained. The difference is that stance gesture is no longer decided by the therapist, and family members can find a suitable position and posture freely in the designated space. Chance would be given to the family to clarify the relationship between their sculpture and their understanding of themselves and their family. With these done, the therapist should guide the family to reshape their family sculpture according to their expected goals. In the third stage, parents and children are treated separately. It can refer to the structure of David Read Johnson's developmental transformation therapy (DVT), and invite them to imagine a real or metaphorical illusory scene by themselves. With the cooperation of the therapist, they should complete the performance starting from the images they visualized. For therapists, interventions should adapt to the situation when guidance is needed. In the fourth stage, the parts party can be transformed by the combination with the empty chair technique to fit the fact that no one knows a person better than himself or herself, so clients should speak for themselves and play the characteristics of the selected protagonist. The empty chair is used for role reversal to express feelings about their characteristic, and the processes may be easier to control compared to coordinating the time and performance of numerous people. In the fifth stage, temperature reading can cooperate with body movements and clients can respond to each other's performance, rather than just talking to themselves. At the last stage, badminton games can be retained, but therapists need to find the embodiment of good communication mode in the family and guide the client to migrate this mode to other occasions in life.

According to the adjustment of the original cases, the family sculpture, parts party, and temperature reading techniques are retained, which is conducive to the comparison and integration with

dramatherapy due to the drama element they contained. For the procedure of each dramatherapy, this article mainly refers to Rene Emunah's Integrative Five Phase model, which is composed of these five parts: dramatic play, theatre, role play, psychodrama, and dramatic ritual [15]. Of course, the design of this case does not strictly follow the above procedure. After all, dramatherapy is a changeable process, and the blind following is unnecessary and may affect the therapeutic effect. Moreover, the description of the adjustment of the original case does not describe the warm-up and closing ceremonies. The reason for skipping the beginning and the end is not that they are unimportant, but that there are many kinds of warm-up games and closing ceremonies. In real application scenarios, adjustments should also be made continuously with the change of clients so they will not be covered here. What should be kept in mind is that any stage of dramatherapy should be taken seriously.

## 5. Discussion

After adjustment of the two therapy models, more space is given for limbs to participate in the case. Gestures, spatial relationships, and the application of sculpture techniques, which are more accurate and credible than verbal expression, can all become effective dramatic language and externalize individual emotions. In addition, the movement of the body is conducive to improving the mood, and clients can also reasonably vent and express their feelings on the stage in this way, which helps them to overcome their personality weaknesses such as onstage tension and shyness, to improve their character.

Secondly, the significant increase in interaction within the family during the treatment process is instrumental in liberating the thinking of family members. Clients can return to a certain situation in the drama and understand the problem mode of circulation from the inside. This may help clients to look at the current situation from a new perspective, and think about the rationality of the family reaction and how to break the rigid family rules, to develop healthy contacts with the family.

The therapeutic techniques of the Satir Model can be enriched by dramatherapy. During the treatment process, the client is given more initiative, and the therapist only serves as a guide or partner. Every person and family has their habits in dealing with all kinds of affairs and contradictions. Therapists should give the right back to clients to choose a solution for themselves and teach them to independently explore the appropriate way to achieve the "congruence" advocated by Satir [8].

The Satir Model can also be one of the theoretical sources of the application of dramatherapy in family therapy. It is partial and incomplete for some scholars to view dramatherapists as anti-theoretical. What they are against is just rigid application of the proven effective model. An ideal drama therapist can improve, integrate and transform various theories, and turn them into his unique techniques at the right time. In the context of family therapy, the Satir Model is no doubt a well-tested prescription, and it is expected to achieve better efficacy with dramatherapy.

Some problems remain to be solved in the current social work. After the end of the treatment when a client leaves the therapist, it is difficult to confirm whether the effect can be maintained while there are many external interference factors. Therefore, it is necessary to mobilize the client's determination to change during the healing process to ensure that they keep track of their thoughts and deeds. For this point, dramatic exercises can indeed lead to more sober and profound insights for clients and bring them interesting experiences, which make them willing to cooperate with treatment objectively and emotionally as well.

However, this case only involves one family, so there is no consideration of member selection. But if it is group therapy, which involves multiple families, the inclusion criteria should be taken into account in multiple dimensions. Homogeneity and heterogeneity are not the only criteria. Irvin D. Yalom and Modyn Leszcz's *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* mentioned the reference standard for selecting members, but it is for group therapies, not precisely for families. Maybe the research in this domain also needs to be developed. Both single-family treatment and multi-family

treatment have their pros and cons. The former is more targeted, and the latter can increase the continuity of unity and enhance the treatment effect by creating a common symbol memory [16].

In addition, dramatherapy has a high threshold for the client. Excluding external factors like time and money, not everyone can smoothly enter the scene under the guidance of the therapist. They usually have emotional and expression barriers, and they need long-term mild bedding to have the courage to pass on their difficult words implicitly. It is these people who have been hiding their true feelings with masks that need help from dramatherapy. From this perspective, perhaps dramatherapy can go out of the door and step into different life scenes to make humanism infiltrate into the client's mind. The familiar environment is more likely to arouse psychological and physical reactions, especially in family therapy with familiar people. Richard Schechner, the father of environmental drama and American drama theorist, also believes that drama is not limited to the performance space on the stage. Of course, it will be a challenge for drama therapists, not only to have more acute insight and stronger field control in drama directing, but also to spare no effort to guide clients to detach from their roles in drama. Whether dramatherapy can be combined with environmental drama and have the fluidity of space is also a dimension that needs practice.

## 6. Conclusion

The combination of dramatherapy and Satir family therapy mode provides multi-level intervention approaches for family therapy. First of all, dramatherapy can help family members experience and understand the interaction mode in the family intuitively through role-playing and situational simulation. Secondly, dramatherapy provides a specific and creative way for family members to exchange their emotions and needs. This kind of creative expression helps to suppress anxieties to the surface, reduce psychological burdens, and establish a positive atmosphere in the treatment process. Under the framework of the Satir Model, dramatherapy can also help family members identify and change unhealthy patterns in the family system. It helps to enhance the structure and function of the family and improve the mutual understanding among family members. Under the guidance of the Satir Model, individuals can understand the impact of family dynamics on themselves, and how to better adapt to and grow in this system.

Generally speaking, the combination of dramatherapy and Satir family therapy mode can provide innovative approaches for family therapy. Through this comprehensive application, individuals and family members can explore emotional expression and interaction mode in a safe and creative environment, to promote the overall health of individuals and families. This kind of mode not only broadens the way of treatment but also provides flexible tools for professionals to better meet the needs of different families. It is undeniable that compared to other forms of psychological therapy, there is a lack of theoretical summary and concrete studies in dramatic therapy. Due to its disciplinary nature, dramatherapy places more emphasis on practice and on-site adaptation, and its performance does not have to stick too precisely to

theories. However, it cannot be denied that the summary of writings is an important way to pass on knowledge, and it is also an indispensable way to disseminate the form of dramatherapy. Future research can attempt to put the conceptualized ideas of this article into actual practice. Besides, the cultivation of future dramatherapy talents can not only rely on personal experience but also provide theoretical guidance. There are supposed to be more targeted research and methodological summaries to enrich the theoretical system of this discipline, thereby further promoting innovation and progress in dramatherapy.

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