



# The transmogrification of warm-up: From drama to psychodrama



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present a critical analysis of the concept of warm-up by tracing its historical development from early colloquial uses, through its uses in drama, to its current use in psychodrama. It begins by examining the usage of warm-up in the early twentieth century, followed by its usage in general theatre, impromptu theatre, therapeutic theatre and psychodrama. It follows the particular usage to which Moreno put it, and shows how this led to its educative and therapeutic usages. It shows how warm-up is principally valued for its utility amongst practitioners as a workable heuristic. It concludes that, as a heuristic in psychodrama, it has transmogrified into four importantly different concepts, which, although evident in its use, have not been explicitly recognised, limiting its practical and theoretical usefulness.

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## Introduction

This paper traces the ubiquitous concept of 'warm-up' from its early colloquial usages through to its current highly specialised usages in psychodrama, to examine how it has come to have such a specialised and specific form in psychodrama. Warm-up is a concept capturing fundamental relational consequences and effects present in all human activity, but is poorly described and conceptualised, and what conceptualisation there is lacks clarity and consistency. In most forms of its usage in the literature it is used by experts in psychodrama to articulate a readiness to get engaged, or a process for getting individuals or a group ready to engage in some form of action and is not defined with any rigour (Carter, 2014; Lai & Tsai, 2014; Leveton, 2001; Moreno, 1999; Somov, 2008; Yaniv, 2011). Non-psychodramatists' use of the concept – for example, Long and Soble (1999), Wilkinson, Srikumar, Shaw, and Orrell (1998), Eren et al. (2014), and Jang and Choi (2012) – while much less extensive, follow the same pattern.

The critical analysis in this paper starts with an overview of the concept of warm-up as it is currently used in general scholarly and professional literature, before briefly looking back to its early colloquial use. Then follows an examination of its usage in mainstream or 'legitimate' theatre and in the impromptu drama theatre of J. L. Moreno, as the original developer of psychodrama

and group psychotherapy, in the early twentieth century. This section is followed by an examination of how Moreno's unique use of the concept made the leap from drama to therapy, its relationship to spontaneity and therapeutic group work, and its place in modern psychodrama. Finally, it is argued that there are four distinct concepts embedded in that of warm-up. It is suggested that the conflation and confusion of the four concepts in psychodrama goes some way towards explaining the lack of consistency and clarity in explications of the concept to date.

## Warm-up's ubiquity in sport, music and other settings

Warm-up, as a concept, is used in a very wide variety of contexts. The gymnastics journal, *International Gymnast* and the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* each has an editorial called 'Warm Up' (Highwire Press et al., 1969; Normile, 2008). Physical education is continually developing and modifying warm-up routines (Walter, Quint, Fischer, & Kiger, 2011). In physiology, there is research into whether or not a standard warm-up causes fatigue and less warm-up permits greater power output (Tomaras & MacIntosh, 2011). In cardiac surgery, there is research into the effect of an exercise warm-up on heart recovery for injured hearts (Tomai et al., 1996). Strength and conditioning training investigates and researches the value of physical warm-ups (Sweet & Hagerman, 2001). There is research investigating the value of a surgeon warming-up to surgery by playing video games before cutting (Korkes et al., 2009). In opera, choral music, or pop singing, there is warm-up for a musical ear, for listening and there is warm-up for vocal preparation (Cetto, 2003; Gish, Kunduk, Sims, & McWhorter, 2012). In the

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discipline of history, the concept of warm-up is used to consider the relationship of bystander nations to others' wars and battles such that consideration is given to whether bystander nations will warm-up to interfering (Marolda, 2011). In astrophysics and chemistry, the concept of warm-up is used extensively as part of each discipline (Hassel, Harada, & Herbst, 2011; Woodside, 1996). Solo musical instruments all have their own ways of warming-up the performer to their music and their instrument, as do ensembles (Garcia, 2009). Warm-up is a central concept in all forms of dance and is used extensively for the preparation of practice and performance, including more specialised forms such as ballet and improvisational dance (Diana, 2011; Franklin, 2003; Reeve, 2011). Warming up an audience is considered essential for live music, comedy and TV (Hambright, 2009; Leader, 1992; McHenry, Johnson, & Foshea, 2009). Actors have warm-up processes for their voices, their bodies, their role and for relationships within performing ensembles (McHenry et al., 2009). Storytelling is used as a warming-up process in a variety of settings, such as public lectures and speeches as well as teaching (Pennino, 2009). Group facilitation has its own term, 'icebreaker', for warm-up (West, 1997). Various psychotherapies, such as psychotherapy with children, group counselling, using art, play, dance and other art forms, as well as psychodrama, utilise warm-up (Dayton, 1990; Guyer & Matthews, 1981; Lowenstein, 2010; Moreno, 1956; Nylund, 2000; Wilkins, 1995, 1999; Xia & Grant, 2009; Yalom, 2005). Drama therapy, a closely allied therapy to psychodrama also relies on warm-up processes for individuals and groups (Emunah, 1994). Similarly, playback theatre uses a warm-up practice in rehearsals and in performance preparation of individuals, their relationships and the ensemble, as well as in performances to assist the audience in being interactive with the performers (Dennis, 2004).

These examples demonstrate the prevalence of a concept of warm-up in a wide range of areas including, but not limited to, psychodrama. In dance, sport and health, as well as a variety of medical and physiological research, the concept is applied to areas that relate to the preparation of muscles (in fingers, legs and arms), nerves (response time), membranes (vocal chords), organs (lungs and heart), or ligaments (in arms and legs) for exertion of some type. For instance, ballet performers might spend more time on their warm-up than on performance and often up to 25% of rehearsal time on warm-up (Williams, 2011). Warm-up is used as a concept in the vocal preparation of the larynx and vocal chords for performance by singers, dramatists and public speakers. Likewise with musicians, in preparing their fingers, lungs and bodies for performances. Warm-up is also used in drama as part of the preparation by an actor for taking on a particular role: for getting 'into role'. In an acting ensemble, warm-up exercises are also used for developing a bond between the ensemble cast and developing a spirit of liveliness or flexibility (Mohler, 2012). In most live music and comedy performances, there is usually a 'warm-up act'. Levine (2011), for example, discusses his professional role of conducting the warm-up of the audience for live TV shows.

These uses of the concept of warm-up have in common, firstly, the idea of something being done to an individual or a group, by either an individual or a group, in preparation for some action, and secondly, by implication, that a person or a group has a given level of warm-up at any time. These concepts of warm-up are discussed later in this paper.

### Warm-up in colloquial historical use

The concept of warm-up was used colloquially for some time prior to its use in theatre or psychodrama, but its use was not

extensive. The examples below are included to show both its historical use and that this has not changed substantially.

"... warm up the soul with the love of Christ..." (Cuyler, 1901, p. 37); "...the author cannot warm up to his subject..." (Thompson, 1906, p. 746); "... will warm up the child nature, the play spirit, in the old man and the old woman" (Jerome, 1910, p. 132); "much slower to warm up to the occasion," (Bruner, 1914, p. 384); "the happy faculty to warm up to people..." (Jacoby, 1919, p. 583); "I have known her to warm up-to resent something that was said..." (Whitman, 1919, p. 30); and "he gradually warms up to his work during the forenoon..." (Dockeray, 1922, p. 365).

The uses of the term warm-up increased substantially following the initial publication of *Sociometry: A Journal of Inter-personal Relations*, in 1936, which included papers about sociometry, psychodrama, and other action research and therapy methods, including a number by Moreno (e.g., 1937a,b). Warm-up was, and remains, an integral part of such methods. Once again, these examples have in common, firstly, the idea of something being done to an individual (by themselves or another), and secondly, that a person or a group can be said to have a given and recognisable level of warm-up at any one time.

### Mainstream theatre

Warm-up is what people do in the legitimate theatre, by which Moreno meant mainstream theatre, which here refers to theatre where the actors enact prepared, deliberated, designed, planned, premeditated and well-rehearsed roles. It could also be called 'formal theatre' or 'the theatre', as we know it more generally (Hodge, 2000; Moore, 1984; Moreno, 2007; Wanhg, 2006). It is what an actor does to get ready to be an actor (June, Teresa, IsabelleZita, & Tiagoroth, 2013). It is done in the theatre to get the actors ready to go out and act a role that is 'not them', for a period of time. In the legitimate theatre, the warm-up process is strongly related to the preparation of lines for performance, trying out the scenes with the other actors, and to telling a pre-defined story, in a pre-defined manner, and with continual input from the theatre director. There are warm-ups for the voice (Lanklater, Stanislavski, Hagen, & Carnegie, 2006; McHenry et al., 2009). There are body and movement warm-ups (Garrett, 2010; June et al., 2013). There are warm-ups for acting ensembles to assist them to work well as a dramatic team (McGee Wilson, 2011; Price, 2011). A person playing Hamlet, for instance, would learn the lines, practice reading the lines on their own, and, with a partner, practice looking the part and practice delivering their lines with the other actors. The warm-up is to try to be as 'Hamlet' as possible, or the particular version of Hamlet for which the theatre director is aiming. Part of the warm-up is to have the actor leave as much as possible of themselves and their personal fears, worries, concerns and distractions behind, in order to be 'Hamlet'. The more effective the warm-up in legitimate theatre, the more familiar are the performances to the general audience and these familiar performances may even be imbued with the odd novel, yet acceptable variation or dissimilarity from other versions of the same play, as determined in advance by the director. As Moreno (1956, p. 39) wrote somewhat condescendingly, the purpose of this form of warm-up is to 'fill him [the actor] again and again with clichés, the clichés of Romeo, King Lear or Macbeth.' In 'legitimate theatre', where a conventional drama is being performed and the audience knows what to expect, they actively expect not to be surprised, imposing restraint against significant *ad-libbing*, any surprises coming from the quality of the performance (Moreno, 1956, p. 390).

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