

Mirroring, Doubling and Role Reversal in Psychodramatic Couple Therapy.

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Mirroring

In a face to face interaction one person mirrors another in tone and body language aiming to take in what the other is expressing and indicating to the other that they have been seen and heard. There are many forms of mirroring in psychodrama. It is useful to read Max Clayton on mirroring in his book on role training, here is an excerpt:

A group member, whom we will term the auxiliary, portrays what he observes the protagonist doing. This auxiliary virtually repeats what the protagonist has already said and done. In this case the auxiliary does very well. He is able to warm up within himself to the meaning of what the protagonist has been saying as well as to the feeling tone. He is also able to warm up to the physical expressions of the protagonist. He looks and sounds as the protagonist did. His portrayal has an air of reality. It is done with conviction. The different elements of role, the map of the universe, that is revealed by the verbal content and sentence structure, the physical actions, and the set of feelings are congruent. The portrayal carries weight and assists the protagonist to warm up to herself in response. These are vital things, for if the auxiliary does not accurately portray the role, they may not be accepted in the role by the protagonist.

(Clayton 1992:27)

This is the quality of mirroring that is good for the therapist to achieve with each of the partners, and the partners with each other in their encounter. This form of accurate mirroring is predominant in couple therapy as the depth of involvement may be such that deeper mirroring is not easy. However mirroring can go further:

... mirroring the first two or three times will endeavour to portray the expression more literally whilst those mirroring after this may focus on certain aspects and even exaggerate to a great degree and thus the portrayal involves greater symbolism and imagination.

(Clayton 1992:28)

Mirroring enables the auxiliary to tune in with the protagonist, and is the basis for taking their auxiliary work to the next step, role reversal.

Role Reversal

With role reversal the auxiliary steps into the shoes of the protagonist and sees through their eyes. Read the five purposes of role reversal by Max Clayton in “The Spirit and Purpose of Role Reversal” (2008). The article is mostly of a psychodramatic production on the stage using auxiliary egos from the group. Of course such enactments are also possible in couple therapy. However in couple therapy it is useful to see the principles of role reversal in action as two people interact face to face. Physical role reversal can disturb the flow in an encounter, yet role reversal is needed and can happen.

Purpose of role reversal for the protagonist

Imagine a protagonist hearing something like this from their auxiliary:

“When I step into your shoes and see what you have been saying through your eyes... then it makes sense you think of leaving! *Of course* you would want to leave if you think I won't be faithful to you. *Of course* you want to leave if you think your needs for connection will never be met in this relationship.”

This creates **validation** for the protagonist who experiences being seen not as bad or mad but acting as a human being. It also creates **connection**. The protagonist can see the auxiliary has got it, and is not being judgmental.

When I look I am seen, so I exist.

(Winnicott 1971:134)

Purpose of role reversal for the protagonist for the auxiliary

If the auxiliary who can truly see and grasp what is going on for the other person and express it is able to own their own experience — and not see it as caused by the other. Role reversal is an act of **differentiation**. Seeing their partner nod in appreciation of their ability to step into their shoes is **connecting** for them as well. Through role reversal it is possible to see how the other person makes sense and is then not as disturbing to be with them. Collaboration is possible.

One of the most popular surplus reality techniques in psychodrama is that of role reversal. If, for instance, a husband and wife fight in the reality of daily life, each remains in his own role, in his own life situation. The perceptions, expectations, fears, disappointments, or whatever of each remain unchanged. And even if both parties

come to some point of agreement or disagreement, they still maintain the same relative status which they have in life. The husband remains the husband, the wife remains the wife. But in role reversal we request the wife take the part of the husband, and the husband take the part of the wife. We expect them to do this not only nominally, but to make an effort to go through the actual process of reversing roles, each one to try and feel his way into the thinking, feeling, and behavior patterns of the other.

Moreno, Chapter 1, Fox, 1987, Essential Moreno.

Role reversal is the foundation for doubling. Once the auxiliary can step into their partners shoes then they can go a step further, and by doubling help them to articulate what they want to express but find it hard to say.

Doubling

The double, becoming the other at a visceral level, accesses feelings the protagonist may not be aware of or yet have words for. Doubling is the essence of progressive encounter. Being doubled is one of the first ways a child learns they exist and accept themselves.

A definition of doubling: "... two persons, A and B are one and the same person."

Moreno 1978:723

A Brief Statement of What Doubling Is

What is the essence of doubling? As I see it, doubling is becoming another person through entering their life. It is a process in which one person identifies with another person's view of the universe, with their actions, and with their emotions and feelings. In that process, the double develops a two-way interaction with the other person that is in tune with the direction of the other person's being. Thus doubling is expressive of a relationship with every aspect of another person, in contrast to one that involves a warm up to only one aspect or one subsystem or cluster of roles.

Clayton, 2009

The following passage from Zerka Moreno (2005) in the Psychodrama Network News shows that doubling is not a therapist's 'skill'. It is not 'empathy'. Doubling in its conception includes the relationship, it is not the intuition but the voice of the interpsyche – the relationship between two people.

...this is just the area of Moreno's contribution, namely to have pointed out that it is the interaction between people – tele – resulting in the "inter-psyche," the space between people, that is the foundation of his and our work ... It is our emphasis on the moment, the here and now, the spontaneity of the protagonist, the interaction of minds, that distinguishes our own field from that of individual psychology, a lesson we must never overlook.

More about this in my blog post:

<http://psyberspace.walterlogeman.com/2011/doubling-and-tele/>

Therapist as Double

Through doubling the therapist shows the couple the conversation they would be having if they were consciously connected.

The therapist doubles the auxiliary to assist them to stay an auxiliary and to not get caught up with the responses that are coming up for them.

Coaching vs doubling

Doubling is becoming one with the other, giving voice to what is in the other... But not their dysfunction... Find the loving partner, the creative listener in them as you are them and double that.

Doubling the Protagonist

The therapist doubles the protagonist to reveal the progressive aspects of their roles.

Self reflection

- When I see
- Then I think
- Then I feel
- I need/value
- I will

NVC resources

Non Violent Communication has a strong focus on language that is without blame, and helps to avoid blame built into our everyday language.

Feelings: <https://www.cnvc.org/training/resource/feelings-inventory>

Needs inventory <https://www.cnvc.org/training/resource/needs-inventory>

Evaluative Words Confused with Feelings:

http://en.nvcwiki.com/index.php/Evaluative_words

More about needs. NVC description <http://en.nvcwiki.com/index.php/Need>

Doubling the Auxiliary ego

The partner who offers or agrees to listen, the auxiliary may find it hard to sustain that work once the heat comes on.

Sometimes their first thoughts are something like “that’s wrong!” “I am more present than that.” There is a principle: You might not be able to control the first thought but you can the second e.g.:

Helping them regain the commitment they made to listen can be done through a coaching doubling:

I will be curious

I agree to listen

I'll save that valuable thought for later

I'm here for my partner

"I offered to listen"

"It is my turn to be here unconditionally"

"I can learn from this"

"I am doing this for the relationship...love... My love...

*

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Victor Frankl

References

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