

“A Cast of Thousands” - Working With The Five Instruments of Psychodrama in The Therapeutic Relationship

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Introduction

Psychodrama is traditionally and more commonly known and experienced as a group therapy method. However, some of us work primarily with psychodrama in the 1 to 1 setting. This requires shifts in our thinking, ingenuity and creativity as therapists. There is very little written on the similarities and differences between group and individual psychodrama. Over recent years we have become intrigued by the challenge of using psychodrama in the 1 to 1 setting; by the importance of the space we work in; by the use of the objects that occupy that space as potential auxiliary egos and audience; and how these relate in the context of the therapeutic relationship between therapist and client.

Moreno (1953) identified the psychodramatic method as using five instruments “the stage, the subject or actor (protagonist), the director, the staff of therapeutic aides or auxiliary egos, and the audience” (p.81). Take a moment to picture the room in which you work with clients. In that room there will be an area you think of as the action or therapeutic space (stage). This will be distinct from office space. There will be at least two chairs or other seating arrangements for you the therapist (director) and the client (protagonist). Around the therapeutic space will be other items of of furniture and various objects, cushions, pictures, books, etc. This could be thought of as an audience.

In this paper we will explore how Moreno’s five instruments of psychodrama may be applied in the 1 to 1 setting, so as to assist the development of spontaneity in the client.

space and my capacity to make room for a depth and range of therapy beyond me in the past.

It is not just that there is more room but that there are a variety of spaces, e.g. a verandah, pillars, a clear office area and the action area itself. The effect of the room on the people who come in is often remarked upon e.g. 'What a welcoming place'. The plants, posters, furniture and objects of all kinds all convey their own message which may be one of hope or life or struggle or possibilities.

As the relationship between therapist and client develops, the space becomes a container that safely holds the feelings and experiences that emerge. The space develops familiarity and flexibility as the client explores its potential and sets scenes for a variety of situations.

The Protagonist, The Director and The Auxiliary Egos: Bringing These Elements Together in The Therapeutic Relationship.

The therapeutic relationship is the dynamic encounter between therapist and client, that emerges when both are working together towards enhancing the spontaneity and well-being of the client. The therapeutic relationship is the primary vehicle for one-to-one therapy. Ultimately clients are most likely to remain with a therapist because the therapeutic relationship seems viable - that is, strong enough to contain the depth of work the client is preparing to move into.

Psychodrama appeals to me as a model to assist me to understand and work within the therapeutic relationship, because psychodrama theory and practice emphasise the essential value of encounter - the relationship of person to person, of person to self, of person to group and person to environment. Psychodrama holds as a starting point, a picture of the healthy spontaneous individual, rather than the sick patient. So the therapeutic relationship begins as an encounter between two adults who are both competent in some aspects of their lives. The client enters into the relationship as a free agent who chooses to engage in therapeutic work. The therapist brings her willingness to travel alongside the client on their journey. The therapeutic relationship

Various issues may influence the decision of whether or not to take on these roles. To act as director and to also enter into various roles within the client's drama may create confusion in the minds of some clients. The presence of the therapist in the therapy room, is a significant aspect of the containment that the client requires to do therapeutic work, so while the therapist is taking another role, her presence as therapist must also be felt. The variety of auxiliaries available in a group session, enable the protagonist's transference to have a number of potential targets. Williams (1989, p.192) notes that "The 'internal objects' become living auxiliaries. The director slips back as the 'transference object' and group members fill up the roles occupied by historical figures from the protagonist's past." Without additional auxiliaries in the 1 to 1 setting, role-taking by the therapist may increase transference. This may mean that taking on certain roles is contra-indicated. For example, Hudgins and Toscani (1996) argue strongly that the therapist must not take on a perpetrator role in a drama, as the client risks losing sight of the therapist as the safe therapeutic guide.

Yet oftentimes a client is assisted by having an actual person in the role, by being able to make eye contact with the other person, and by being able to respond to the sound and the strength of the spoken words. The therapist taking on the auxiliary role, will expand the depth of the encounter, particularly in areas of the client's life where their capacity to imaginatively enter into the situation is limited.

The Use of Objects as Auxiliary Egos

Moreno speaks of a staff of auxiliary egos in the group setting. "These auxiliary egos or participant actors have a double significance. They are extensions of the director, exploratory and guiding, but they are also extensions of the subject, portraying the actual or imagined personae of their life drama. The functions of the auxiliary ego are threefold: the function of the actor, portraying the roles required by the subject's world; the function of the counsellor, guiding the subject; and the function of the social investigator." (1953, p.83). In this sense, the director is the only one available in the one-to-one setting to be an auxiliary ego. However the description above could apply just as well to the symbolic objects or props used in a session (e.g. toys, materials, magnets, etc)`. It is as though the symbolic objects make available to the client vast

and this new role seems to be assisted by the time spent with the object outside the therapy session. Recently a woman was startled by the eye of a crocodile hand puppet as she reached for something else. Later when the system she was exploring was laid out, I asked who or what was the crocodile's eye in the system. The Cold, Heartless, Watching Judge was crucial in the system and was transformed to a Discerning, Caring Observer no longer remote and uninvolved. She asked to take the crocodile home so she could get to know this new role in herself.

Just as the participants in a group bring their experience and life history to the auxiliary ego roles they take for each other, it seems the objects when chosen provide a similar service.

The symbolic objects are metaphors of their very nature and working with them stretches the client beyond their well trodden paths of old systems and surprise them into new ways of thinking and being. In choosing an object, the client is already acting spontaneously and well on the way to change. The change will not always be visible in the words used but may be manifested in the behaviour that ensues. Musical instruments are a recent addition to the therapeutic space. The very day the drum was installed a client announced "On my way here I decided that today I want to learn to walk to the beat of a different drum." Seeing the drum was affirming and exciting for her and the sound of the drum and the movement of her body allowed her to experiment and develop the beat of her new life.

Audience

Moreno spoke of the audience as having a double purpose in psychodrama. "It may help to serve the subject, or being itself helped by the subject on the stage, the audience becomes the problem. In helping the subject it is a sounding board of public opinion." (1953, p.84) If we think of the symbolic objects around the therapeutic space as the audience in the one to one setting, then the purpose is a single one - that is, to serve the client by being a sounding board of public opinion. It is useful to look at what objects we have available. Do they offer a breadth and depth of opinion in the roles to which they warm up clients? It seems even for the client who has a limited role

one-to-one setting. The therapist is required to be flexible and versatile in a multitude of roles. The use of symbolic objects as auxiliary egos and audience and the therapeutic space as stage, are important adjuncts to the development of the therapeutic relationship. Therapy becomes both enjoyable and challenging with a "cast of thousands" to draw upon.

References

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