

Psychodrama: Applied Role Theory in Psychotherapeutic Interventions

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Abstract: Psychodrama is a method of therapy originally created by J. L. Moreno. It is best understood as a method integrating aspects of existential therapy, Gestalt therapy, transactional analysis and Jungian analytical psychology as a holistic form of multimodal psychotherapy. Psychodrama is effective because it emphasizes engagement through active role play and dramatic dialogue as the major factors which lead to transformational change. Throughout this paper four main psychotherapeutic techniques are reviewed which define psychodrama. They include the following: (1) promoting dynamic group interaction, (2) compelling experiential participation in subjective phenomena, (3) providing opportunities for catharsis, and (4) facilitating basic psychotherapeutic techniques. Each approach is considered, in turn.

If the future of mankind can be 'planned,' then conscious evolution through training of spontaneity opens a new vista for the development of the human race (J.L. Moreno).

Toward the end of his first published book, *Who Shall Survive?*, Jacob L. Moreno (1889-1974) described his hope for humanity -- the transformation of human consciousness through the integration of creative play, spontaneity, and psychological theory (Blatner, 2000). Psychodrama is the tool that Moreno developed as a method to facilitate this transformation. It is an action-oriented method of psychotherapy which incorporates the mind, body, and spirit in active role play. Psychodrama is also experiential, as deeply held perceptions, patterns, and beliefs are expressed, bringing the unconscious into consciousness. It is a mode of psychotherapy in which active role play facilitates therapeutic change (Blatner, 2000).

A pioneer in group therapy, Moreno (1946) suggested that when an individual acts out particular roles or incidents within a group, he or she will explore unconscious patterns, uncomfortable emotions, deep conflicts, and meaningful life themes in the safety of the therapeutic group. Internal patterns and conflicts are made external. People actually experience struggles as opposed to simply talking about them in a detached manner. As a result, one will be able to gain new awareness and insight. This awareness allows for increased clarity in seeing the alternatives for changing life patterns.

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Psychodrama is essentially an existential encounter between a group of people. By employing a social network to facilitate deep change, Moreno invited people to live out the Golden Rule -- reversing roles and imagining what it may be like to be the other person, promoting empathy, compassion, and self-reflection (Blatner, 2000).

Furthermore, psychodrama is unique in its attempts to go beyond the linear methods of talk therapy to promote deep self-awareness and integration. Moreno's (1946) methodology is a growth model emphasizing individual responsibility and the creating of one's destiny. Unique to psychodrama is the use of primarily role play in therapy to promote joy, enthusiasm, excitement, playfulness, vitality, deep feelings, sharing, and the integration of these emotions with the greater spiritual self.

This paper considers the theoretical underpinnings of Moreno's psychodrama as a school of thought and as a method of psychotherapy. Psychodrama is best understood as a modality integrating aspects of existential therapy, Gestalt therapy, transactional analysis and Jungian analytical psychology as a holistic form of multimodal psychotherapy. Indeed, psychodrama is a synthesis of many innovative forms of therapy from the last 50 years.

Defining psychodrama

As mentioned, psychodrama is a technique for expressing difficult emotions and facing deep conflicts by having group participants enact significant life events. It is a method to externally express the internal psyche and work with a person's representation of the past, present, and future in the current moment. For this reason Moreno (1972) defined psychodrama as "the science which explores 'the truth' by dramatic methods" (p. 12). Moreno (1972) emphasized that the main goal of psychodrama was to help clients discover their inner truth, express repressed emotions, and create authentic relationships with others.

The basic mechanics of psychodrama involve group participants assuming specific roles. The *protagonist* in the group is the person who represents the themes of the group drama. His or her experience is the primary one represented (Jeffries, 1998). *Auxiliary* egos are represented by group members who assume the roles of significant others in the protagonist's drama. Moreno labeled the *audience* those group members who witness the drama and represent the world at large (Jeffries, 1998). The *stage* is considered the physical space in which the drama is conducted, while the *director* is the trained psychodramatist who guides participants through each phase of the session (Jeffries, 1998).

After all phases of the enactment are complete group members share their individual experiences. Generally this involves participants revealing the subjective experience of playing their role -- relating feelings, experiences, awareness in the moment, and thoughts regarding their own life (Blatner & Blatner, 1997).

Beyond the mechanics of the technique, perhaps the most essential aspect of psychodrama is the psychological underpinnings of the events clients explore. Imperative to the experience is a recognition of an individual's once unspoken thoughts and feelings. These include the consideration of relationship dynamics of individuals not present, the acting-out of fantasies of what other people might think or feel, and the consideration of different ways to view an issue (Farmer, 1996). By revisiting old behavior and reaction patterns, group participants will often choose to try out more effective ones. The result is not only a change in interpersonal skills but also integration on cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual levels (Farmer, 1996).

Psychospiritual underpinnings of psychodrama

Unique to Moreno's theory was its metaphysical and theological underpinnings. In the mid 1930's when Moreno published his first book, psychology and spirituality were seen as different and separate. Yet Moreno (1972) boldly suggested that individuals are co-creators with God, indicating self-responsibility in what one creates in life and in the world in general. God is not seen as a separate being floating in the sky, but rather as an expression of immanence -- the indwelling of the Supreme Being. By this definition all existence and each being is an expression of God.

Additionally, Moreno (1972) suggested that God acts within the creativity of each individual person. Such creativity and spontaneity is believed to be a connection with God as an expression of transpersonal identification. Rather than being a moralistic God, Moreno (1972) proposed that God encourages aesthetic values which highlight pleasure in creativity, discovery, and celebration of life. Therefore God does not act in the role of a judge, but is instead one who invites caring, compassion, and the achievement of our full potential (Moreno, 1972).

Moreno's philosophical and theological views greatly influenced the theory and practice of psychodrama. Theoretically, psychodrama is a holistic form of therapy addressing implicit, subconscious concepts of God. For Moreno (1972), part of living consciously is addressing individual views about God and spirituality. Moreover, Moreno (1972) saw spirituality as essential to clinical activities. This includes examining

fundamental existential concerns universal to the human experience such as choice, freedom, self-determination, and the responsibility to shape one's life.

Therapeutically, psychodrama creates encounters in which individuals have the opportunity to discover the world through another's perceptions. Truly one can participate in spiritual dialogue. In psychodrama the protagonist can encounter God by using fellow participants to engage in spontaneous conversation and role reversal. Taking on the role of a higher power, an individual will find oneself spontaneously coming up with individualized and surprisingly meaningful answers to long-asked existential questions (Blatner, 2000).

Furthermore, Moreno's suggestion that God is immanent, creative, and the supreme co-creator promotes respect and honor between group members. To see the light of God in each group member and to gain an understanding of the universal struggles of all human beings discourages what Moreno (1972) called the "cultural conserve" (p. 52) while encouraging conscious living in each and every moment. Such spiritual views promote a broad vision of individual struggles and experiences -- both for oneself and for others. As a result, one's impulse to judge or criticize diminishes (Moreno, 1972).

Moreno's contribution to psychology: A dual perspective

One of Moreno's unique contributions is an emphasis on a number of themes so often overlooked by other systems of psychology. These themes highlight his broad psychospiritual beliefs which formed the underlying basis of psychodrama. Such beliefs suggest this method is best considered as both phenomenological and existential.

Psychodrama is considered phenomenological because of an emphasis on viewing the world from the protagonist's subjective frame of reference. It is phenomenological in that it addresses the individual way in which he or she may perceive the world (Liebert & Liebert, 1998). Because the emphasis is on the present moment, Moreno (1971) believed one's psychic reality can only be understood from the person's own viewpoint, based on his or her subjective experiences. Thus it is how one consciously perceives reality which is important, even though this perception may not always coincide with objective reality.

Furthermore, many of Moreno's (1972) themes suggest existential concepts offered by philosophers and writers going back as early as the 19th century, including Fyodor Dostoyevski, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Viktor Frankl. Adam Blatner reviewed a

number of these themes during a presentation at the International Association for Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama (August, 1998). They include the following:

1. Moreno's background as a theologian, sociologist, psychologist, and psychiatrist influenced the development of the theory and practice of psychodrama. As mentioned, Moreno's view of God as immanent and inviting creativity challenges us to live in each moment consciously, and with vitality. This philosophy implies a belief that we have free will, self-determinism, and are capable of solving our own problems. Moreover, it suggests a capacity to recreate ourselves. In this way our existence is never fixed but in a constant state of transition; we are constantly emerging and becoming. This is an optimistic view of human nature. Moreno promoted a mindset of engaging in creative life experiences to find meaning, significance, and purpose.

2. Unique to Moreno during his era was a belief that creativity is best evoked via spontaneous improvisation rather than planned, rational behavior. For Moreno, to be spontaneous was to connect with one's inner core, searching within to find answers to struggles rather than seeking direction from other people. This indicates an emphasis on what Viktor Frankl (1992) referred to as the struggle of the courage to be -- to live life authentically.

3. As one of the initial proponents of group theory and practice, Moreno believed that psychodrama could be applied to groups within all aspects of society. He believed psychodramatic techniques could be applied to psychology and sociology to promote healing and creativity not only for individuals but also to society as a whole. Perhaps Blatner (1998) said it best when he suggested Moreno's "role theory was a natural bridge between the two levels of human organization, and many of his methods addressed the group context and interpersonal realm as well as intrapsychic phenomena" (paragraph 14).

4. Moreno placed a high value on both overt and subtle forms of communication within active role play. Through the spontaneity and creativity of role play Moreno believed the healing of mind, body, and spirit would occur. Active role play requires using the entire self to fully re-experience the drama in the moment. Rather than simply talking about feelings as though they were a detached part of the individual, Moreno employed the Gestalt therapy concept of experiencing feelings in the here and now -- verbally, visually, kinesthetically, and viscerally.

Similar to Fritz Perls, Moreno believed in the healing power of conscious experience. Rather than just talking about traumas, psychodrama

participants experience their feelings in the moment as revealed in their gestures, tone of voice, choice of words, physical stance or other verbal and nonverbal behavior. The unconscious is brought into consciousness and made concrete. As a result, repressed conflicts are uncovered and worked through toward a corrective reframe.

Moreover, rather than talking about a childhood trauma involving a client's mother, a client can become the hurt child, with group members playing the role of the mother. He or she can speak directly to the mother in the re-enactment and fully experience internal conflicts. By fully experiencing the trauma, he or she will relive the pain, release it, find resolution, and gain a deeper understanding of oneself and others. This allows for acceptance and integration of one's personality that may have been denied or disowned during the traumatic event.

5. In order for spontaneity to occur, a safe and playful environment must exist. Group members must be free from any consequences of exploring new attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Moreno believed that role play releases spontaneity and allows for experimentation and self exploration. More importantly, play brings into awareness the child-like aspects of the self which can be a powerful element in integration of fragmented aspects of the psyche.

6. Moreno viewed drama as a natural by-product of the pretend play of children, as well as religious and social ritual. From Greek tragedies to Shakespearian comedies drama has played a role in the history of all cultures in some form or another. It is a means by which we have represented different aspects of ourselves individually and as a social group. Through drama we investigate issues, express our shadow, experience joy, explore our imagination, and encounter different aspects of our selves. Moreno simply extrapolated drama to the psychotherapeutic milieu.

7. Moreno emphasized the phenomenological aspect of psychodrama, relying upon an individual's relationship with and reactions to real-world events. Such spontaneous improvised expressions of an individual's drama offer an opportunity for personal transformation. A person can have a conversation with someone who has died, God, an unborn child, a feeling, a sensation, or one can replay a painful event creating a different ending.

8. The self-expression central to psychodrama functions as a channel for sublimation. Similar to art therapy, dance therapy, sand tray, poetry, and other therapeutic forms of self-expression, psychodrama offers a means to express uncomfortable feelings, shadow aspects of the personality, and primitive impulses.

9. Psychodrama gives individuals the opportunity to tell their story. Expressing the full impact of traumatic experiences with others provides an environment where one can be heard, known, and undergo interpersonal bonding with others who have experienced similar plights of the human experience. Transformation can occur with the re-storying of the story teller via acceptance and love of group members. Additionally, revealing the true self in this way allows a person to continually re-create oneself, thereby promoting the conscious transformation of consciousness.

One of the main contributions of Moreno's (1971) active role theory is his belief in two levels of experience in each interaction -- 1) the self who plays roles and externalizes the inner world, and 2) the self that observes the role play. The self can now express that which may have been latent in the psyche, while the observer gains intellectual awareness and engages in self-reflection. This combination allows for a meta-role function so essential to transformational psychotherapy (Blatner, 2000).

Psychodrama as Therapeutic Intervention

Psychodrama as a therapeutic process is effective because it emphasizes engagement through active role play and dramatic dialogue as the major factors which lead to transformational change. Four main psychotherapeutic methods facilitate this change. They include the following: (1) promoting dynamic group interaction, (2) compelling experiential participation in subjective phenomena, (3) providing opportunities for catharsis, and (4) facilitating basic psychotherapeutic techniques (Blatner, 2000).

Dynamic group interaction

As one of the first to develop the group therapy format, Moreno spent most of his career refining different forms of group counseling, including psychodrama (Johnson, 1999). Throughout the last 50 years different theorists have continued to investigate the benefits of group interaction. One of the best known listing of therapeutic factors in group psychotherapy is in Yalom's classic textbook *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. These 11 "curative factors" (Yalom, 1975, pp. 3-4) are reviewed below along with a brief explanation regarding how psychodrama methods facilitate these essential therapeutic factors.

1. *Instillation of hope*. Yalom (1975) observed that individual group members find encouragement and hope by seeing others in the group in varying stages of transformation. Similar to other forms of group therapy,

psychodrama brings together people who have an expectation of change by observing fellow participants who have already benefited from the psychodramatic method. Hope is also instilled by meeting a therapist who passionately believes in the potential of the therapeutic processes ignited by psychodrama (Moreno, 1971).

2. *Universality*. Yalom (1975) found that many individuals believe that their problems are unique. They feel alone, afraid, and shameful. Within the environment of a supportive group, members can share feelings with others and realize their experiences are similar within the human condition. As group members are fully accepted in spite of their weaknesses, feelings of shame and isolation subside. Transformational group methods like psychodrama facilitate the revelation that others have similar problems thereby reducing isolation and alienation (Moreno, 1971).

3. *Imparting of information*. Yalom's (1975) research indicated that sharing information about the process of psychosocial transformation is often helpful to group members. In psychodrama basic information is shared regarding skills involved in communication, interpersonal problem solving, and self-awareness to name a few. Psychodrama is a method by which individuals can acquire and practice these skills (Moreno, 1971).

4. *Altruism*. Yalom (1975) suggested that in sharing their own experiences group participants learn how to be helpful to others who are suffering. Role reversal in psychodrama encourages one to recognize the similarities between all people -- their weaknesses, faults, and strengths. It follows that such commonality promotes empathy and compassion for the plight of fellow group members. The psychodrama method highlights Alfred Adler's concept of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, or community feeling (Mosak, 2000). Adler believed that to transcend interpersonal interaction was to develop the feeling of being a part of a larger social community. Adler suggested this to be the most important of all social attitudes, as it inhibits egocentrism while promoting social interest (Mosak, 2000).

5. *Corrective recapitulation of the primary family group*. Yalom (1975) found family of origin issues at the core of much psychodynamic dysfunction. Psychodrama offers an opportunity for corrective emotional experiences via active role play and role reversal. Group members acting as auxiliaries assist the protagonist in the drama to re-create a scene in which he or she transforms both feelings from the past while empowering the individual in the present (Blatner, 2000).

6. *Development of socializing techniques*. Yalom (1975) suggested that participation in a group allows for members to learn how to resolve conflicts, to be helpful, to be less judgmental, and to be more empathic. By

using psychodrama, one will develop these skills and learn to relate to others in the group in a healthy way through intense experiential events. This is a powerful modality for learning, as these skills can then be used outside the group experience.

7. *Imitative behavior.* One way group members learn new behaviors is by picking up on and trying out healthy behaviors displayed by others in the group. Albert Bandura (1977) found modeling to be an important facet in learning. Moreover, Bandura (1977) emphasized that role playing new behaviors can deepen the learning process. Psychodrama provides an opportunity to try out these behaviors.

8. *Interpersonal learning.* It is a commonly held belief that one's own experience is the ultimate teacher. One aspect of this wisdom is the notion that we learn about ourselves by being in relationships with others (Yalom, 1975). The interpersonal focus of the psychodrama group allows for dynamic person-to-person interaction. In the psychodrama group this interaction promotes corrective emotional experiences as members begin to express long-held emotions and begin to clarify interpersonal boundaries and limits. The group offers a supportive, safe place to begin this process. As group members become more conscious regarding their own patterns of interpersonal relating, a clarity emerges which can only be gained by an intensive group interaction by using a method like psychodrama.

9. *Group cohesiveness.* The relationships that members of a therapy group develop facilitate healthy intimacy and connections (Yalom, 1975). Particularly in the psychodrama group one feels accepted even when expressing individual ideas which may not conform to the rest of the group. Members learn they can belong to the group without being forced to suppress their own feelings or ideas. Central to the psychodrama method is allowing for self-expression, whether unconventional or traditional. For this reason individuality is encouraged over allegiance to group norms (Blatner, 2000).

10. *Catharsis.* The safety and support of the intensive environment characteristic to psychodrama groups often culminates in a cathartic experience for participants. The awareness of repressed feelings and experiences into consciousness allows for their release (Yalom, 1975). According to Moreno (1971) the psychodrama methodology catalyzes this release allowing for ego integration and expansion.

11. *Existential factors.* Via the powerful psychodrama experience, group members gain an awareness of the universal nature of pain, death, aloneness, and individual responsibility (Yalom, 1975). These struggles

become a shared experience and thereby reduce the associated shame and fear so often felt.

Moreover, the dramatic nature of psychodrama builds group cohesion and support. Group members begin to hold one another responsible for their behavior. Meanwhile participants also begin to recognize their own responsibility for change. By taking responsibility, individuals become empowered -- a critical step in personal transformation.

Experiential participation

Psychodrama compels experiential participation. An individual's internal experience is expressed externally thereby allowing the participant to gain a degree of self-awareness which cannot be otherwise attained. For example, in psychodrama skills are learned using multiple ego techniques by the protagonist playing out different parts of the self. These parts can dialogue with one another, struggle, and negotiate (Blatner, 2000). At times a person may come up with roles which have been long out of awareness like the wounded self, child self, or critical self.

Moreover, psychodrama is noted as a form of therapy where action is added to verbal self-expression. The energy created by uninhibited expression of the internal psyche is critical in clarifying experiences and the feelings they bring up (Arkowitz, 1997). As Blatner (2000) commented:

If not expressed, these complexes are subject to a host of illusions, excuses, avoidances, doubts, and other maneuvers which blur the level of consciousness. Only through presentation to others are these cognitions brought into explicit consciousness, from backstage to centerstage, into the figurative 'spotlight' of awareness (p.100).

Psychodrama is unique in the experiential nature of the method. It is a physically active form of therapy which brings together the interaction of body and emotion (Blatner & Blatner, 1997). Experiences once stored in the body during trauma become activated, returning an individual to any unconscious material needing resolution. Psychodrama allows for the accessing of unconscious body memories so that they can be experienced, concretized, worked through and subsequently reframed (Kipper, 1997).

Furthermore, physical and emotional expression activate an enormous amount of energy -- both internally and externally. Using the body to move releases those body memories encoded within the nervous system connecting a person more fully to his or her feelings. Researchers and clinicians who specialize in healing body memories like Francine Shapiro (1995) believe that traumatic information is stored in the same way in

which it was first experienced. The information processing mechanisms which exist in the human mind-body system become blocked from this experience (Shapiro, 1995). Therefore when a body memory is released after many years, an individual will become the child who was previously beaten. He will feel his mother's hands on his body, see the image of her face, and experience the assault just as if it was happening all over again. As Shapiro (1995) describes:

In effect, the information is frozen in time, isolated in its own neuro network, and stored in its originally disturbing state-specific form. Because its biological/chemical/electrical receptors are unable to appropriately facilitate transmission between neural structures, the neuro network in which the old information is stored is effectively isolated (p. 40).

Psychodrama effectively releases these 'stuck' memories from the body, mind, and unconscious, freeing long-held energy from within this complex storage system.

Psychodrama is a tool designed to use these energies toward experiencing the deeper meanings in behavior. Moreno (1971) referred to this as action insight. This is experiential learning at its best. In psychodrama the abstract becomes concrete; the psyche is experienced kinesthetically and viscerally. The complex activities of the psyche are externally exhibited and re-created. To physically interact with these facets of the self is a powerful tool in gaining awareness, releasing emotion, and finding clarity.

Similarly, Carl Jung (1957) created a technique which he called active imagination in which clients express various unconscious archetypal elements within his or her psyche. Jung (1957) believed active imagination to be a spontaneous, experiential process. Like psychodrama, active imagination allows unconscious images to be revealed with little conscious intervention. Jung (1957) would direct his clients to clear their mind so that an image could arise. After a moment of directed concentration images would spontaneously appear. Clients would then be encouraged to verbally and physically act them out, entering the scene and becoming a part of the action, directly experiencing their unconscious images.

Jung (1957) found the experiential nature of active imagination to be central to healing the psyche. He suggested that only by directly experiencing unconscious material is one able to transcend and heal fragmentation of the ego. Rather than verbally processing or cognitively reviewing psychic material, the physical experiencing of the unconscious, Jung (1957) believed, offered a much more transforming experience. Similar to Moreno's (1971) psychodrama the experiential component of

bringing the unconscious into consciousness, concretizing it and acting it out allows for an awareness and clarity difficult to come by via other therapeutic means.

Active imagination and psychodrama are both experiential, spontaneous, and undirected methods designed to express the thoughts and wishes of the ego. Jung (1957) believed active imagination to be a bridge between passive, receptive awareness of unconscious material and active responding to this material by whatever spontaneous form the client feels necessary.

Active imagination seems to support Moreno's (1971) view that wholeness is a result of bringing the unconscious into conscious awareness. The psyche is considered by both Jung (1957) and Moreno (1971) to be a purposive phenomenon. Similar to psychodrama, active imagination is a way to directly experience our inner life while still maintaining our conscious sense of self as observer (Jung, 1957).

Opportunities for catharsis

Aristotle was the first to mention catharsis as the "purging of the spirit of morbid and base ideas or emotions by witnessing the playing out of such emotions or ideas on stage" (Chaplin, 1985, p. 71). Moreno expanded this concept, bringing it into the psychotherapeutic milieu. Moreno believed that in a drama where no scripts exist, both the actors and the audience become free to improvise, outwardly projecting their own unconscious. An essential aspect of this projection is catharsis (Bemak & Young, 1998).

Throughout the history of psychology, some clinicians have minimized or misunderstood the transformational value of catharsis. Freud initially employed the technique, recognizing the value of recalling and expressing repressed psychic material. However, with the subsequent rise of behaviorism the value of catharsis was mostly disregarded until Moreno incorporated it into psychodrama in the 1930's (Brennan, 1994). Reportedly, Moreno seemed to understand the healing power of catharsis to be more than the expression of intense emotions. He believed it to be an essential element in reunifying fragmented parts of the psyche, thereby reintegrating the self (Bemak & Young, 1998).

Several post-Freudian perspectives hypothesize the underlying dynamics of catharsis as essential to the reunification process. It is believed that the psyche will fragment in an effort to cope with traumatic experiences. In this way the mind is protected from painful thoughts, pushing them out of immediate awareness. This results in a splitting or division of consciousness (Liebert & Liebert, 1998). Such fragmentation

can be observed in varying degrees ranging from mild neurotic behavior to more extreme fragmentation exhibited by individuals suffering from schizophrenia or dissociative identity disorder (Liebert & Liebert, 1998).

Proponents of psychoanalysis would say that such splitting is an example of ego-defense mechanisms unconsciously acting to help an individual cope with anxiety. Defense mechanisms prevent the ego from being overwhelmed. For instance, denial is a way to distort what one feels, thinks, or perceives during trauma. The experience of threat is minimized as one becomes blinded to those painful instances too overwhelming to accept. A split occurs between reality and one's inner experience (Corsini, 2000). Other types of defense mechanisms similarly act by separating consciousness from unconscious reality by further denying, distorting, or disguising one's experiences (Corsini, 2000).

While the psyche responds to this type of compartmentalization, its usefulness is temporary. In the final analysis, that which the psyche has fragmented is missed and needed by the whole self (Blatner, 1999). Clinicians hypothesize that on some level the psyche is aware of the inconsistencies and demands full expression. The truth of one's experience seems to find expression, often through unconscious means. Dreams, slips of the tongue, forgetting, delusions, and projections are a few of the many common ways that the unconscious finds expression (Corsini, 2000).

Thus, while the unconscious may be out of awareness, it directly influences behavior. Eventually this repressed material interferes with functioning, as the individual becomes mentally exhausted by the great amount of energy required to maintain the illusion. This imbalance is considered to be at the core of neurotic behaviors (Corsini, 2000).

As previously mentioned, psychodrama allows for catharsis of deeply buried, long-held emotions. During catharsis the protagonist will relive experiences, bringing repressed ideas, feelings, wishes, and memories of the past into consciousness. Catharsis results in a great release of repressed emotions and an unburdening of associated traumatic incidents (Kipper, 1997).

Blatner (2000, p. 114) has reviewed 4 types of catharsis commonly experienced in psychodrama. These include the following:

1. *The catharsis of abreaction.* The awareness and full expression of previously repressed feelings expands one's self-concept. Catharsis reveals the inner integrative processes of the psyche. The individual now reclaims once disowned aspects of the self.

2. *The catharsis of integration.* Thoughts and feelings are reframed based upon corrective experiences. The expression of untapped feelings

allows for an upwelling of energy once used to contain and manage psychic splits. The result of this release of energy is a newfound creative proclivity.

3. *The catharsis of inclusion.* An individual no longer feels alone in his or her experience. As group members accept and regard the protagonist in spite of his or her faults, the individual gains a sense of belonging and inclusion.

4. *The catharsis of spiritual re-connection.* After a cathartic experience a participant will often experience a broadened view of one's psyche -- including weaknesses as well as strengths. On an existential level he or she commonly discovers a sense of one's place in the world. Moreno (1972) referred to this as a cosmic catharsis. It is a re-joining with that part of the self which connects with God

Meanwhile catharsis without further integration is ineffectual. Moreno has suggested that integration must follow catharsis for full healing of the psyche. It isn't enough for individuals to gain an awareness of their emotions. They must also continue the process toward wholeness, integrating those fragmented aspects of the psyche (Bemak & Young, 1998).

Vicarious catharsis

Unique to psychodrama is the vicarious catharsis of group members as the protagonist acts out his or her experience. Moreno noted that even if group members do not share primary issues, the protagonist's experience will still evoke the emotions of fellow group members (Bemak & Young, 1998). It is commonly believed that in some way all people share experiences central to the human condition -- grief, pain, suffering, anger, joy, or excitement. Yalom (1995) discussed the value of catharsis in group therapy, describing it as an effect of universalization. Group members connect with the feelings the protagonist is experiencing, essentially uprooting any repressed feelings of their own. The protagonist's experience becomes a catalyst for the experiencing of unexpressed feelings by fellow group members.

Moreno (1971) commented that group participants often see themselves in the experiences of the protagonist. As a result members may feel a connection with those themes which give meaning and purpose to life. In this way catharsis becomes a healing agent not only for the protagonist but also for all participants in the group.

Psychotherapeutic techniques

Psychodrama as a form of therapy facilitates several process variables which encompass experiential activities common to different theoretical approaches. According to Farmer (1996), Moreno applied psychotherapeutic techniques as they were intended -- as facilitative processes to aid individual dynamics and to assist individuals in the change process. Adam Blatner (2000, p. 227-228) has highlighted a number of Moreno's common techniques. They include the following:

1. *Requiring physical action as opposed to talking about a problem.* This uproots repressed material, bringing it into consciousness. Abstract issues are now more concrete. Once concretized, the protagonist can directly interact with the psychic manifestations created.

2. *Promoting authentic encounters whenever possible.* Throughout psychodrama the protagonist and auxiliaries speak directly to one another rather than to a third party.

3. *Encouraging participants to make statements beginning with "I".* The elimination of depersonalizing language reduces the tendency to distance oneself from feelings while promoting an increased sense of self-responsibility.

4. *Having participants experience their feelings about the past in the here and now.* Group participants connect with their experience with vividness and immediacy rather than merely talking about it. Actually becoming the hurt child and talking directly to a parent involves reliving the pain of the moment, and releasing the potential to change it.

5. *Attending to paraverbal and nonverbal communication like physical gestures, speed of speech, tone of voice and so on.* Such cues provide a source of rich information because they often betray feelings of which a person may be unaware. Their recognition is instrumental toward increasing a person's awareness of themselves.

6. *Providing an environment which encourages increasing levels of self-disclosure and honesty.* This means giving participants a safe space in which to experience and display a wide range of feelings, responses, and actions.

7. *Utilizing symbols and metaphors, making them concrete, giving them a voice, and allowing them full expression.* By concretizing a metaphor, the protagonist can interact kinesthetically and viscerally with these images, experiencing physically that which was once only an abstract image.

8. *Integrating psychodrama with other psychotherapeutic approaches.* A number of commonly used therapeutic approaches work well in

combination with psychodrama, including behavior therapy, guided fantasy, hypnotherapy, Gestalt therapy, and bioenergetic analysis to name a few.

One approach particularly effective is Heart-Centered Energetic Psychodrama, which combines Heart-Centered Hypnotherapy and traditional psychodrama. Techniques common to Heart-Centered Hypnotherapy like trance induction, age regression, energy release, and a heart-centered ending are combined with the re-enactment of a current conflict or experience (Zimberoff & Hartman, 1999).

In Energetic Psychodrama the therapist induces and later maintains the protagonist in a trance state. The client is then asked to recall a current life conflict. The enactment of this conflict generally triggers an earlier source of emotional trauma. Through age regression the protagonist is able to go back to the source of this initial trauma. As a result unconscious material and repressed memories become known. They can then be expressed and released. This allows for a greater awareness of existential and karmic life patterns (Zimberoff & Hartman, 1999).

9. *Employing a variety of warm-up techniques.* These techniques are designed to develop a sense of safety, a foundation of trust, a working alliance, group cohesion, and self-exploration. These may include brief role play, self introduction, introduction of a fellow group member and so on.

At the center of these psychotherapeutic techniques are the utilization of the mind, body, and spirit in transformational growth. These methods reveal psychodrama's phenomenological and existential underpinnings. Applied from a place of respect, empathy, and a nonjudgmental frame of reference these techniques compel an individual's reflective exploration of the self.

Concluding comments

Psychodrama is a dynamic form of psychotherapy emphasizing engagement through active role play. Moreno's methodology is holistic, using the mind, body, and spirit to reconcile polarities and dichotomies within the individual. A major goal of psychodrama is the reintegration of all aspects of the self.

Some of the key aspects of this approach stress promoting dynamic group interaction, compelling experiential participation in subjective phenomena, providing opportunities for catharsis, and facilitating basic psychotherapeutic techniques. Psychodrama is an experiential therapy emphasizing here-and-now awareness, the reviving of body memories, and

concretizing abstract psychic phenomena. Once such unconscious material is made conscious it can be fully experienced and worked through.

The therapist's role is a complex one, acting as both facilitator and director of the exploratory process (Corsini, 2000). A therapist must facilitate an individual's own process rather than teaching or interpreting a participant's experience. Group members are expected to do their own sensing, interpreting, and feeling in contrast to a therapist naming these insights (Corsini, 2000).

Additionally, psychodrama allows for a great deal of creative flexibility. A therapist can freely integrate a number of other psychotherapeutic orientations. Aspects of hypnotherapy, cognitive therapy, behavior therapy, transactional analysis, and to some degree reality therapy fit well into the psychodrama paradigm.

Moreover, for psychodrama to be effective a therapist must have a high degree of personal development, having worked through his or her own blind spots and gained clarity with one's own issues. He or she must be aware of the difference between one's own needs and that of group members. Of critical importance is being able to maintain the emotional environment for group members and being fully present in the moment -- particularly during instances of catharsis or abreaction. Meanwhile, in the end, the mechanics of the psychodrama are not as important as the usage of these tools with a great deal of creativity, sensitivity, and compassion.

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