

HOW TO EXPERIENCE A PSYCHODRAMA DEMONSTRATION

by D Miller

1. The role of audience member of a psychodrama demonstration differs fundamentally from taking in a drama. In a drama the actors are there to entertain; in a psychodrama the audience is there to help the protagonist achieve satisfaction. This means that your being here implies you are willing to accept the responsibility of participating on stage, if you should happen to be called upon. The protagonist risks openness with you; how can you do less than risk yourself for them?
2. Wipe out the common and mistaken preconception that the protagonist continues with a heavy sense of exposure to the group, for early in the psychodrama the protagonist loses sight of the group in favor of their own overwhelming personal concerns. The group is still there, but it's being there is background, not focal. The ongoing interaction, first with the director, and later with the auxiliaries, gives the protagonist the feeling that s/he is not alone in this venture. Moreover, s/he is under no pressure to be anything other than who s/he is. Unlike the professional dramatic actor, s/he can do no wrong.
3. Let go of the observer standpoint. If this is your first psychodrama, begin experiencing the protagonist's world, from the protagonist's point-of-view. Better yet, be the protagonist, if you can. After you have come to an appreciation of the protagonist, imagine playing the other roles you see on stage. You may be called upon to do it. Would you be ready? If so, you may be ready to second-guess the director. Not an easy task, for beginners. Obviously one must experience many psychodramas to experience psychodrama. Experience rises to its maximum as you, over a period of time, risk the roles of protagonist, auxiliary, double and director.
4. Some psychodramas call forth a display of fireworks; more do not. The ability to release bottled-up feeling comes more readily to some than others. If you find your journey with the protagonist arid, resist the temptation to let your mind wander. You may miss seeing how the director orchestrates the production, with deep concern for the protagonist's feelings, rather than whether you are seeing what you expected to see when you came. Stay with the psychodrama and you may find yourself taken by surprise at a sudden change of tempo. But whether it happens or not, the needs of the protagonist come first. The director has future psychodramas in view, psychodramas where the protagonist may open up, once having learned here that their limits would be respected.
5. Note how the director protects protects the protagonist from the impatience of others. Normally the protagonist is blind to matters obvious to others, and for good reason. S/he needs to be. When a member of the audience forgets their function and seeks to impress one and all with their insight, the director will cut them short before the protagonist's precarious balance has been disrupted. Chances are that the intruder's observation was correct, but it was profoundly incorrect for them to thrust it upon the protagonist. Discoveries have their time. The premature observation or interpretation may create an inordinate delay in the protagonist's growing.

6. The psychodrama may or may not "solve the protagonist's problem". The protagonist's initial concern may be but the tip of the iceberg. Some psychodramas stay at the tip, others plunge to the depths, but the plunge is not necessarily the better course. Moreover, focus not on the so-called problem, but on the person in the midst of their relationships. Forego searching for the villain. Fault-finding is futile, unhelpful and unnecessary. You would not experience the others in the protagonist's world as s/he does, unless you were the protagonist. Were you to meet any such persons outside the psychodrama, you would find them different, not because they are different from the way the protagonist has represented them, but because you are!

7. Respect the protagonist's privacy. Discuss the particulars of the psychodrama only with persons who have been there with you, and take care that you are not over heard. When someone asks you "How was the psychodrama?" reply in terms of your own feelings as you wish, but shield the identity of the protagonist. The breaking of confidentiality is a major violation of humanity and stark evidence of your irresponsibility and immaturity, to say the least.

PSYCHODRAMA, DESCRIPTION AND DEFINITION

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Like drama, psychodrama sets scenes to highlight conflict and to move toward resolution through cooperation between actors and audience.

Unlike drama, psychodrama bypasses prepared scripts, as the director improvises, calling upon any willing audience member to enter or exit the stage.

Like group therapy, psychodrama supports, while participants shed burdensome pretense, disclose real selves, and reach out to others in work, school, family, and love settings.

Unlike group therapy, psychodrama invites whole pictures, fostering here-and-now action rather than there-and-then talk. Body movement engages feeling, and vivid presentation insures group understanding and response through sharing experiences similar to those witnessed.

Thus psychodrama functions like a healthy family, includes everyone, and welcomes personal growth.

Psychodrama is ...

1. That professional practice
2. based upon a spontaneous,
3. collaboratively-directed, auxiliary-assisted,
4. Action-centered dramatic method,
5. Normally immersed in a climate of acceptance, which moves the group process toward the implied promise of reconciliation, healing alienation and estrangement,
6. thereby calling forth from relational structures within and beyond those directly participating a free disclosure
7. of restless pasts, current confrontations, and imagined futures,
8. fostering the emergence of at least one protagonist, warmed up to self-presentation, enactment and reenactment
9. in encounter with fantasy and reality figures
10. concretized in sequences of specific scenes depicting the private and public, creature and cosmic worlds from which they've been drawn,
11. all to be role-played in the here-and-now
12. as further amplified through the use of selected techniques such as doubling, mirroring and role-reversal

13. in order that perception may be sharpened as barriers fall,
14. alternatives expanded and explored, creativity unleashed,
15. connections among levels of experience made, integrations realized
16. and validated in sharing, enhancing the awakened capacity to risk deeper commitment to an ever more inclusive sense of community.