

Moreno, ZT, Blomkvist, LD & Ruetzel, T. (2000) Sharing in Psychodrama in *Psychodrama, Surplus Reality and The Art of Healing*, Routledge, London pp. 63-65.

Sharing in psychodrama

Sharing is the last phase of a psychodrama; in it the group members share their feelings and experiences from their own lives as they refer to the psychodrama. One reason for the sharing phase is that the protagonist has revealed a great deal from his/her life and now should be getting something back from the group. This phase has a cathartic effect on the group members, who are able to relieve some tensions, which during the course of the drama have been building up. The following conversation may throw some other lights on sharing and to what extent the sharing should be protagonist-centred or directed to the drama's content.

DAG: Could you tell me about the history of sharing in psychodrama?

ZERKA: Occasionally we would bring patients from Beacon to the open sessions in New York City, which Moreno gave for mental health professionals. Instead of bringing the professionals up to Beacon, we took patients down to the city to demonstrate our work. Once in the late 40s Moreno brought a lovely young woman who became our protagonist. After the session the psychiatrists began to analyse and to interpret her. After the second or the third remark he saw that the girl was crumbling. She had come away from the session with a clear eye and a good feeling about herself, and now they were cutting her to pieces. They were disillusioning her.

Finally Moreno said, 'Stop. This is not good; not good for the protagonist, not really a good process. I will tell you why. All of you have different orientations and all of you will give a different interpretation. Now it is true that the patient has never had the attention of so many psychiatrists. That in itself is something worthwhile, it may make her feel better. However, that is not really what we want. We do not want you to be psychiatrists, we want you to be group

members. We would like you to share from your own life.' Can you imagine psychiatrists talking about their own lives? It was a profound revolution. They are trained to maintain professional distance, or, as in psychoanalysis, to be a blank screen. So this idea of sharing of their private lives was quite a threat and completely out of their realm. It may well be that this was another reason why Moreno was so often met with hostility from the psychiatric fraternity.

DAG: Did this come as an impulse to J.L. Moreno at that moment?

ZERKA: As an awareness that this was not good processing for the protagonist. It was not useful as a psychodramatic entry into the group. He was not getting to the group. They were responding from the top of the head to the eyebrows, but not from the heart. Moreno explained, 'You know, when a person is a protagonist and denudes himself or herself in front of us, that is giving us a form of love. The only way to repay love is with love.'

DAG: What did you do before that?

ZERKA: Some directors like to interpret or give advice. In training we now teach them: 'Do not offer advice, be a human guide'. To the group members we say the same thing: 'Talk about yourself, please. Do not analyse or advise.' They have to be taught to have an open heart, not just a head.

So when the next person began to talk again in this rather haughty fashion, Moreno asked, 'Tell me, are you married? Do you have children? Is your daughter this age?' It turned out, as so often happens in psychodrama, that he had a daughter the same age as the protagonist with whom he was having a problem. 'That is what we need to talk about. Tell the protagonist in what way her drama touches upon your own life and experience with your daughter. Here you are a father. Never mind about your skills as a psychiatrist. That does not work here. We all have human problems.'

In fact, I had a classic example of that later on in the 50s. A psychiatrist came to Beacon as a patient and I had brought to Beacon a very disturbed young woman. She watched his session and came to me and said, 'That was the most important session I have attended yet, more important than my own. To see this gorgeous hunk of man, beautiful, handsome, well put together, falling apart in front of my eyes and having exactly the same problem in his marriage that I am having, that was really a lesson for me.' So here we see the reverse: the revealing of self as a human being who has also failed or is also failing.

DAG: This was also what the patient in the psychodrama of Adolf Hitler said: that it helped him to see so many other patients discovering the Hitler within themselves.

However, the following story brought me into a dilemma concerning sharing. I had to make a decision whether the sharing is for the protagonist or for the psychodramatic production by the group. Because, if it is the latter it has many more perspectives than only the protagonist's. The following situation happened to me. I had a man in a group. His concern was that he had killed a boy through drunken driving. He was in great grief and could not imagine how his life could go on even though he served a two-year sentence. I had no idea that there was a woman in the group who had lost her child to a drunk driver. Her sharing was not very supportive to the protagonist. In fact, she said that people like him had no right to live. What do you think?

ZERKA: It was right that she was allowed to share from her point of view and her pain. It may even have been good for him, because he had all that guilt anyway. Here was the accusation, which he deserved and asked for. Maybe he was also asking to be punished, and he got it. But in addition they could have role-reversed.

Let me tell you another story. A young man came to our bi-weekly sessions in New York and wanted to be part of a therapy group. He was Catholic, his older brother was a priest, and he had just discovered that he himself was gay. Everybody in the group accepted it. There was no harshness or judgement. He went away and later called me on the phone to say, 'I cannot join your group'. I asked, 'Why not?'. 'Because you all accept me.' I replied, 'You do not accept yourself'. 'No, I need punishment.' He needed to be the Catholic priest his brother was who told him he was going to go to hell. I had not explored his need for punishment because we have always been taught to be supportive. Being supportive in this case meant giving him the punishment he required to cleanse himself.

DAG: Sharing is very important because it diminishes the transference in the group.

ZERKA: Right. Sharing is the group-psychotherapeutic aspect of psychodrama, besides participating as auxiliary ego on the stage. It is the place where group psychodrama becomes group psychotherapy.