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Chapter 10

The sharing

Gillie Ruscombe-King

> Give truth and receive truth; give love to the group and it will return love to you; give spontaneity and spontaneity will return.
>
> (Moreno 1953: 114)

The process of sharing in the method of psychodrama is an essential component of its task. This chapter will explore how the process of sharing occurs, what form sharing may take and the director's response to that process.

Classically, a psychodramatic enactment has three stages – the warm-up, the action and the sharing, with the appropriate intensity of work attached to each phase. So it is not surprising to find the chapter on sharing at the latter end of the book. After the psychodramatic enactment, the participants are invited by the director to 'share', verbally and non-verbally, feelings, thoughts and associations to the enactment that has just taken place. It can be done in a number of ways. Most commonly, the action or scene setting is disbanded; any props, e.g. cushions, toys, that have been used in the scene for significant objects (for example, my first teddy or a bag of anger) are de-roled – that is they are clearly described as what they actually are; the group reassembles in a circle, as it began, to recreate the 'action' of the group process. The protagonist and all auxiliaries are included in the circle as a way of reinstating each individual as a group member. Sharing takes place face to face across the circle. Should the group be very large and unable to make a workable round, the protagonist may remain on stage next to the director. Members of the group are invited to come up on to the stage with their sharing. If this is the method adopted, it is important that the protagonist is then re-established within the group as a group member and reasserts his or her own identity. The essential part of the sharing process is to facilitate a single protagonist-centred enactment into a process of group psychotherapy.

HOW AND WHY DOES SHARING TAKE PLACE?

The director returns the protagonist to the group

There is a need to reorient the protagonist into the present – in time, space and context. The protagonist, for example, may have found the hurt 3-year-old child within herself. The purpose of the group is to help her experience that aspect of herself and integrate it with the mature married woman with two teenage sons. She needs reclothing with all aspects of herself. After intense psychodramatic work, there is often a sense of being dazed, even disoriented and the director needs to facilitate time and space for the integration of the work to take place. Elaine Goldman, an American psychodramatist, says that the director, in essence, returns the protagonist to the group. For example:

After witnessing Helen's work, Mary said: 'It was so wonderful to see you cradle your own son in that way. My mother, like yours, never had time for me and I have struggled so hard with my own children.'

Sharing helps the protagonist feel acceptable

Powerful identifications in other group members will have been stimulated. Sharing these identifications is crucial to the therapeutic work of the group. It enables the protagonist to feel less isolated, less alone. Goldman (1984: 15) describes the importance of 'linking the protagonist with his environment rather than alienating him from it'. Irvin Yalom's work, when describing the curative factors in group psychotherapy cites 'universality' as important. Many clients, he believes, come to therapy with a sense that:

> they are unique in their pain and they alone have frightening or unacceptable problems, impulses, thoughts and fantasies. After hearing other members disclose distress similar to their own, clients report that 'the disconfirmation of their feelings of uniqueness is a powerful source of relief', and that they feel 'more in touch with the world'.
>
> (Yalom 1975: 7–8)

James describes his agony when surrounded by domestic violence. Joseph begins to sob, not wholly because of what James has described but mainly at the sense of relief that someone else knows how it has been for him in his home.

Catharsis

Yalom also cites 'catharsis' as another important curative factor in group therapy. While acknowledging that, classically, catharsis in psychodrama belongs to the action phase, group members can become very emotionally laden, through identification with the protagonist, and need to communicate their feelings (Yalom 1975: 83).

Jonathan, in his sharing, simply says: 'I feel very moved by your work, Jo. I, too, know what it feels like to be lost in a crowd.'

The power of sharing from group members

The emotional response to the 'staged' enactment can be more intense than that expressed by the protagonist, to the point where a group member is warmed up to work. For example:

After Anne describes the death of her grandmother, Lucy begins to sob uncontrollably and is unable to speak.

Such is the power of identification. The director's management of this scenario will be discussed later in the chapter. The task of the sharing is the making of what is internal external, of what is private public and what feels alienating and paralysing into connections that are universal and liberating. That is the purpose of sharing in a group.

Intellectual catharsis

Intellectual catharsis is as important as emotional discharge. The intellectual understanding of or insight into a persistent pattern of behaviour or emotional response can create a sense of relief. To cite Yalom again, self understanding has a major influence in personal growth and change. 'Learning why I think and feel the way I do (i.e. learning some of the causes and sources of problems) can induce enormous relief of conflict' (Yalom 1975: 84).

Joan, in her sharing with Roger, says: 'I could never understand why my mother was so beastly to my sister and to me. Her own mother rejected her when she was 3.'

The purpose of the sharing is to enable what has been unconscious to become conscious and to create a time for group members to articulate any or all aspects of this recognition if they are able.

WHAT IS THE DIRECTOR'S TASK IN THE SHARING?

Staging

In classical psychodrama, the 'sharing' phase takes place at the end of the group, with participants seated where each person can be seen and heard. The staging and physical management of the sharing needs attention, to encourage intimacy and to facilitate sometimes difficult disclosure. The stage becomes everyone's place of work. However, the geographical positioning of each member is, in itself, a non verbal sharing and needs to be recognised as such.

Jane, after witnessing Veronica's psychodrama about lack of confidence, refuses to join the circle and sits head in hands. The director leaves a space, suggesting to Jane that she join the group when she is able and adds that perhaps she is telling us something important about how Veronica's work has touched her.

Staging for the sharing is as important as the staging for the action and has to reflect the needs of the group and not those of the director.

Analysis vs. sharing

Sharing is a time for relating personal experiences and associations related to the enactment and the whole-group experience. There may be something important to share from the warm up, from a personal interaction, from an auxiliary role or with an auxiliary. It is time for self-reflection. It is not the time for analysis of the action, of what the protagonist did or did not do or say, nor indeed what the director or auxiliaries did or did not do or say. This is the province of processing (in a training context) or supervision and will be addressed in the next chapter. If analysis of the process begins, it is vital for the director to intervene by educating or reminding group members of the task of sharing – reclothing the protagonist, sharing of identifications and promoting group interaction and process.

Helen (to protagonist Paul) Why did you put so much coal on the fire all the time?

Director (to Helen) I am wondering how you might identify with that particular

part of the action? Let's remember we are not here to analyse what we have witnessed.

It is equally important that the director makes this intervention with clarity and sensitivity, with no judgement. When analysis is occurring, it can be a defensive manoeuvre against the pain of the association aroused, creating a psychological resistance to exploring that pain. The defence may be a projective mechanism. Projection may be defined as seeing, feeling or responding to some aspect of another's behaviour, attitude or emotional position but not being able to see it in oneself. It is an unconscious process and will remain unconscious as a defence against the difficulty of assigning the identified behaviour to oneself; e.g. that man is really boring. The task of the therapy is to enable the individual to acknowledge that aspect of themselves, i.e. 'I think I am perhaps a boring person' to allow them the opportunity to change things in themselves.

To continue the above example:

Helen (to Director) Yes, I know that but it is a ridiculous waste of coal.

Helen is perhaps telling us about an anxiety she has surrounding the image of 'putting on too much coal and therefore wasting it' but feels that the anxiety or fear is momentarily too great to embrace. She therefore defends herself from this fear by placing herself in a parental role, although at some level, the identification still lies with the protagonist. The director needs to visualise, momentarily, Helen's own psychodrama around this issue to enable her to disentangle the defence.

Director (to Helen) I am wondering if you have been given the message that you are wasting coal?

Depending on Helen's capacity to re-own her projection, she may say: 'I sound just like my mother! She was always on at us for wasting the coal. We had no money, you see.' Or she may have to work at this for longer and may say: 'I don't know, never really thought about it. But it is true what I am saying, isn't it? He is using too much coal.'

She is now looking for recognition from the director.

Director (to Helen) We can hear what you say and maybe we need more time to think this one over.

Not all projections are so easy to manage. Hostile, even angry outbursts at the protagonist, auxiliaries or director are not uncommon.

Jo (shouting to John) How dare you treat your wife like that? (and then to director) and you (pointing), you should have stopped him!

Clearly, a scene with projections of such ferocity needs careful unpicking. Time is needed for some ventilation as angry feelings in sharing are as valid as tears although they may be less welcome. Time is needed for understanding. It could be said that another protagonist has emerged and a vignette is now happening involving projective and transferential issues. It is not acceptable for the protagonist to be mercilessly attacked. Therefore the director needs to ask him/herself: 'What is Jo really saying?'

By mentally doubling Jo, he may be saying/thinking : 'Christ! Have I really done something like that?!' and towards the director: 'Why didn't you protect/help me with this?' (fear, insecurity and lack of safety) as if to a mother/father (transference). It is here that the director's analytic antennae may be helpful to clarify the process within the sharing.

Director (to Jo) I am wondering if something has frightened you?

Depending on Jo's response to this intervention, and his capacity to drop his highly aroused defence, the scene could go in many ways.

Jo (to Director) You are a fine one to talk!

Director – thinking to him/herself that the focus has shifted to the director and therefore the protagonist is not being attacked, what is Jo really saying?

Director (to Jo) I am wondering if you feel you have lost trust in me.... (Jo may find this very difficult and the director needs to remember that the group is an important tool for containment and identification)... and I am wondering if other people here have lost trust in important people?

Other group members give some experiences and then John speaks to Jo.

John But Jo, that is why I was such a bastard to her. She let me down from day one and I couldn't bear it.

Jo may be able to struggle with some identification, he may not. He may need to go away from the group and think. But essentially, the director has followed the task of disentangling the projection from the protagonist, facilitated identification and provided Jo with a forum to translate fearful conflict into consciousness from where he has a choice to work.

Non-verbal sharing

Sometimes, words are difficult. Useful expression can happen non-verbally – through a glance, squeezing the protagonist's hand or by an embrace. This action

may help the words to come and facilitate the process of verbal sharing. Sometimes, just holding a group member who has been profoundly moved can give him/her a sense of containment, perhaps hitherto not experienced. Containment and holding is a primary task of the group process and can provide the necessary phase of integration of inner strength before further exploration. Non verbal sharing can feel comforting, welcoming and warm.

Projection and identification

The director has to be alert to the fact that with any act of sharing, there may be an element of projection rather than identification. Projection, as previously suggested, may be defined as seeing, feeling or responding to some aspect of another's behaviour, attitude or emotional position but not being able to see it in oneself. It is therefore the director's task to identify this process and help the individual work with it.

After an enactment involving some conflict with mother, Joan became rather overpowering in her comforting of the protagonist. Her actions indicated to the director that something was not quite right and through frank discussion with the protagonist and Joan, it seemed that Joan had observed her own guilt as a mother and could only identify her pain through seeing the protagonist as her daughter.

All interactions will enable further work and it is the task of the director to ensure that all group members own their own projections from the protagonist (and auxiliaries) and that projections are translated into identifications. All responses to the enactment are important, creating a group matrix where profound intrapersonal and interpersonal learning can take place. Monica Zuretti describes the sharing as 'a space in which maturity can emerge' (Zuretti 1994: 213).

SHARING FROM THE AUXILIARY ROLE

In all methods of group psychotherapy, members of the group are wittingly or unwittingly assigned roles. 'You speak just like my sister' or 'Why are you so rigid?' In psychodrama, roles are assigned purposefully and directly in the action phase. 'I would like you to play my father.' Moreno would argue that the concept 'of 'tele' – a mutuality of experience either known or unknown – is a potent force in auxiliary selection. Personal understanding can be gained from playing an auxiliary both for the auxiliary, for the protagonist and for the group as a whole.

Rachel (speaking to Chris) As your sister, I felt so helpless, I just did not know what to say. I too feel helpless sometimes when confronted with anger in this group.

Sharing from auxiliary role can enable the group process to be exposed and used constructively. It is therefore the director's task to ask for feedback and experience of the role before de-roling of the auxiliary takes place.

Jane (to Protagonist) As your mother, I felt so frightened for you. I felt such a strong urge to protect you.
John (protagonist) Well, as you saw, I often seek women to protect me.
Jane (de-roled, as herself) I have just realised that I am always having to protect Michael, my 'little' brother. He is 29 now!! And that is because my wretched parents were never there to look after him.

From this sharing the director may need to remain mindful of the transference towards him/her in this situation. Here we have an enactment of Jane playing mother again. Perhaps unconsciously she slips into this role all too easily – and what of her feelings towards the director who stands by and lets this happen?

Should someone be assigned a 'bad' role – 'I could not possibly ask anyone to play HIM!' – sensitive sharing from this role could be vital to help change perceptions.

James (to Joshua) As your stepfather, I felt that I got so angry with you because I felt so inadequate/insecure/overwhelmed.
Joshua I never thought he had any feelings other than anger!

But again, the director needs to watch closely for projection from auxiliary role.

Andrea (to protagonist) You were such an irritating little boy.
Director Are you speaking as Joshua's mother or as Andrea?
Andrea As Joshua's mother, I mean, look at him, he was such a . . .
Director Does this have a parallel in your own life?

Depending on the strength of the defence to that identification, Andrea may come to see that she too was a very clingy child, or that she had found her own children unbearably clingy. If she is unable to make that shift, the director may have to be firm about clarifying the projection. It may be held in the group until such time as it can be worked with. It may be useful for Joshua's learning to see that he chose an auxiliary that 'cannot let go'.

De-roling auxiliaries

De-roling auxiliaries is a fundamental part of sharing. Clarifying and stating how the person playing the role is different to that role is vital to re-establish personal identity and clarification of self to the group. This can be done after the person playing the role shares what feelings and thoughts they have had in the role.

Director OK Jane, you have identified that you have been protective towards your brother. In what ways are you different to John's mother?
Jane John's mother did not have anyone to support her. I have Peter, my partner. And I do not like budgies!

Clarification of personal identity in the group enables each individual to retain his/her integrity in the presence of the 'whole' and therefore limits the risk of the group repeatedly assigning roles – i.e. choosing Jane as 'the protective one'. It can happen that 'Heather' is always picked as, for example, the little sister. If the sharing and de-roling has been satisfactorily completed, then the director can see that this is a dynamic issue between 'Heather' and the group rather than the result of an incomplete process.

SHARING THROUGH FEEDBACK

In Yalom's list of curative factors in group psychotherapy, he highlights the importance of interpersonal learning. Within this he includes:

- Other members honestly telling me what they think of me.
- Group members pointing out some of my habits or mannerisms that annoy other people.
- Feeling more trustful of groups and of other people.
- The group giving me an opportunity to approach others.

(Yalom 1975: 79)

All interpersonal behaviour will create dynamics that can enhance learning.

To return once again to the example of John and Jane sharing the 'protectiveness':

John I have always felt rather irritated by you and perhaps that explains why.
Jane (roars with laughter) Peter is always saying that I fuss.

This example has an obvious dynamic element and informs Jane as to how she comes across. More straightforward examples may be observations that a group member is always early, or sits in the same place or scratches his nose before he speaks. More emotive feedback may include statements like: 'I can't understand a word you say.'

SHARING THROUGHOUT THE GROUP

Interactions such as these may happen at any time in the group and may not be confined to the closing stages of the group.

Individual response to Group Context

Margaret walks into the group room and says; 'Oh my goodness, it is cold in here!' – a simple remark and probably based on some reality. However, after some dialogue with Janet who says: 'You are always complaining of feeling cold!' – Margaret realises that 'being cold' is something she has struggled with for many years and is related to cold unloving parents.

The response to the action 'of the moment', i.e. 'the cold', triggers an association. By declaring the association and sharing it with the group, it becomes conscious to her, to the group and therefore becomes available for work. The group can remain warm and receptive in response to the issue of her 'coldness' and in spite of it. In the sharing of the 'coldness', and through its reception, there may be a realisation that this is a transference phenomenon to the group – i.e. she perceives the group 'as if' it were cold. Should she begin to experience the group as warm and friendly, her perception may dissolve and she would be working at feeling received.

> The reality of the therapeutic setting is that by exposing needs it is unable to satisfy, it returns individuals to the ambivalent uncertainty or isolation of childhood or traumatic experience, but this time round with the possibility of coming to terms with those needs through the supporting presence and awareness of other group members. . . . There is an awareness to the truth that all those things which harm or destroy the self arise from within, for we grow our own worlds and carry them with us always. As one gets nearer to the crowd the less it appears as a solid threatening mass, rather the crowd becomes a loosely arranged bunch of people with whom one can communicate on many levels.
>
> (Marie Stride n.d.: 37)

Identifying group process

What is said by individuals can inform the director of some aspect of the group process that needs to be addressed.

Amanda comes into the group very annoyed. Someone cut in front of her at the roundabout on her way home from work and she is feeling cross. The director needs to consider why she chooses to bring to the group this apparently small incident. With some facilitation from the director or group member – 'I am wondering if you are describing some issue in this group?' – it transpires that she is feeling very competitive with other group members who she perceives as always 'getting in first'. Her contribution opens up significant work for her and the whole group on issues of sibling rivalry and competition.

S.H. Foulkes, in his important work describing group-analytic psychotherapy, talks of the possibility of seeing the processes in a group on the basis of figure–ground relationship: one can focus on an individual or individuals as the foreground with the group as the background; or vice versa, on the group-as-a-whole as foreground, as figure, and see the individuals' reactions as ground. This becomes important both theoretically and practically when we have to deal with the relationship of the individual to the group, or vice versa. He believes that it is most useful to put the processes of 'communication' and the commonly held ground, the 'communion', into the centre of one's consideration (Foulkes and Anthony 1973: 20).

The group, within a discussion about shops, may be discussing who is getting 'a good deal' from the group. From this arises a contribution from Jacob that he never gets a good deal from anything and that he got a very 'bad deal' from his father.

The group is thus telling the director what is ripe for work and what as a group they could be interested in exploring.

Identifying transference issues

Peter has a tyrannical father and an inadequate mother. He is tense and preoccupied, and although he can play an auxiliary role, he is unable to ask for anything for himself: 'I'm alright, let someone else

have a go.' With cautious doubling, and warm group sharing, it becomes clear that he is really saying: 'I'm not alright as I have never been able to express myself, I can't do it here.'

It may take someone a long time to tease out this transference issue. Patient and careful observation of the 'here and now' enactment towards the director (or other group members) will enable the work to happen.

Transference phenomena may emerge very fast.

> It is the first group that Tom has attended. The group is anxious and talkative. To focus the group on more personal interchange, the director requests the group to throw a cushion to each member. . . . After a few exchanges, the cushion is again thrown to Tom, whereupon he slumps into a corner, holding the cushion, quivering and speechless. He pushes away all offers of help, and when the director goes forward, he shouts: 'Go away, I hate this stupid exercise. Is this meant to help me? You're just like my stepmother, she used to hit me with a stick!'
>
> (adapted from Ruscombe-King 1991: 163)

The director needs to help Tom and the group to work carefully and cautiously with this powerful sharing. A psychodramatic enactment is occurring 'in the present'.

The director suggests that the group makes a circle around Tom and sitting with the group says: 'I think I remind you of those in the past that have been cruel and unpredictable. Perhaps we can share those experiences together, which may help Tom to tell us more about the pain that he is feeling now.' With some tentative sharing about difficult parents, Tom becomes more relaxed and is able to offload some of the very painful memories he had been carrying for years. He begins to feel safer in himself and therefore the slow work of experiencing authority differently has begun.

Finding a sense of self and therefore a separateness from the director can provide a real sense of liberation.

Sam is 20, still living with dominating parents. After some six months in a group, he is late for the group. His previous response would have

been high anxiety and huge guilt. On this occasion, the bus has broken down and events are entirely out of his hands. For the first time he is able to see the reality of the situation – he apologises, asserts his position and steps into the group with more appropriate adjustment.

Closing and completing the transference at termination of the group is important.

To return to the example of Tom, by the end of his stay in the group, albeit a limited and time boundaried period in a residential setting, Tom becomes much less hostile to the director, is able to receive warmth, encouragement and help from the group. He is able to identify in his life those who are there to nurture and protect him. Thus he is able to reclaim the powerful negative projections and identify within himself some nurturing and positive experiences or 'roles' within himself.

SHARING BY THE DIRECTOR

There are different styles and approaches to this often thorny issue. Some psychodrama directors choose to share very openly in response to whatever arises. Some directors will choose situations from their past that are not too 'emotionally loaded' while maintaining a 'non-client' role. Some directors relinquish the role of director and take the protagonist's role. Others maintain a distance and do not offer anything of their own life experiences.

Many will say that, depending on the context of work, their contribution to the sharing process will differ, i.e. in a clinical setting, they might not share in the same way as in say a training setting. Perhaps there is no 'right or wrong'. However, what is crucial to sound psychotherapeutic practice is:

1 whatever action is taken by the director, the conscious motivation is clearly recognised and the consequences of that action are worked with accordingly;
2 that the unconscious motivation is put under careful scrutiny in supervision;
3 that the director is consistent in terms of his/her interventions.

Lucinda has completed an awkward and at times difficult enactment. The sharing is subdued and sticky. The director turns to Lucinda and

says 'I have felt awkward at times.' On reflection, it becomes clear that this comment is motivated by the director's own anxiety to 'rescue' the awkward situation – a countertransferential remark. Perhaps the director's own skills feel at stake here and there is an unconscious need to 'rescue' a sense of esteem. It might be more helpful to recognise the sense of awkwardness in the group and enable the other group members to express it. 'My sense is that you are not alone with your awkwardness, Lucinda.'

The above example would not be so potent if the director had made a professional and considered decision to share with the protagonist after every session. 'I sometimes feel awkward when I go for an interview.' The director then has to consider how that information has been received. The power of the director's role can never be underestimated and the director's sharing can often be given undue weight in terms of its content. In some cases, depending on the relationship with the director, such sharing cannot be absorbed and is frankly disbelieved.

Looking at this from the point of view of role theory, sharing from the director's role can be seen as relinquishing and de-roling from the directorial role to becoming 'a real person'. This thinking may be valuable and provides an interesting model. However, to provide total clarity, a statement such as 'Speaking as Gillie' leaves the group members in no doubt about their own responsibility to their perceptions of the role. Fudging the boundaries is not good practice. Some might argue that directorial sharing provides a good role model. Again, the consequences of that view need to be borne in mind. It may promote inadequacy, envy, mistrust, heightened admiration. From a training point of view, directorial sharing needs careful discussion and scrutiny to promote a clear model of practice. The purpose of sharing is to enhance identification. 'Penetration of boundaries is a unilateral action, transcendence of barriers a mutual one' (Stride n.d.: 31).

CLOSURE

Time together in the group has passed, concentration is disappearing, participants may be feeling 'full up'. Closing the group, enabling members to feel safe enough to leave is a very important directorial task. Such a task may be very simple; it may be very complicated; it will vary according to the context or place in which the group is taking place. In principle, the ending of every session needs to leave members feeling 'safe enough' to pick up their lives in an appropriate way.

Psychodrama is a directive method and powerful forces of omnipotence and control are at the disposal of the director and 'handed' to the director throughout the group. These forces need to be 'handed back' to all group members in order that they are able to reclaim that part of them that has been temporarily projected. Reintegration may be quite straightforward as people complete their sharing.

John After hearing what you said, Duncan, I feel much freer to go and talk to my wife.

Or it may be far more complex and sticky:

Jane I am feeling very confused by what you said, Graham.

A simple direction may be needed to clarify the 'I' or ego strength:

Director Can you identify one thing that is not confusing for you before you leave, Jane?

Transference issues will undoubtedly complicate and indeed inform the process of closure and will take a longer period of time to clarify. Depending on the way group members can reclaim or reintegrate, the director can be informed of the nature of the transference issues left unresolved.

Jo I don't want to go home. You are the only person that can help me (idealisation in the transference).

or

Jane I haven't got anything to offer this group even when we share (unresolved rejection in relation to the group and perhaps the director).

The reader may be asking the question: 'How can I tell when the sharing is "safe enough?"' Working towards appropriate closure can contribute significantly to completing the group. Time boundaries around a group or session are important. Time is used in our society as a means to prepare for an event. In all psychotherapeutic methods, the length of sessions is clearly identified in order for the client to be prepared for the end of the session and for separation from the therapist. The client can prepare for the reinstatement of defences that are needed to handle 'the outside world' and that are necessarily lowered in a therapeutic setting. All psychodrama sessions need to have time boundaries so that the closure process can be honoured.

The context of the psychodrama session may dictate the time available. Out-patient groups usually have to vacate premises; groups in residential settings – hospitals, clinics – may have specific times for lunch, etc. In some residential

settings, there may be no such constraints and the sessions may last until the session is completed. While supporting the notion of flexibility and freedom to create empowerment, this way of working can ride across the important notion of reclaiming power and reinstating defences. Furthermore, some of the training for psychodramatists is conducted in settings where flexibility is at hand. It is even more important to address, in training, the notion of closure and the importance of time boundaries in order to inform good practice. Perhaps, in settings where there is flexibility, new time boundaries need to be clearly negotiated, with agreement between the director and the group members rather than a quick decision taken by the director. Every psychotherapist will tell you that important material often comes at the end of a session – because of the safety of the imposition of a time boundary. Psychodrama is no different. It is important that every director recognises this phenomenon.

Complications in closure

What if powerful material presents in the sharing? The task of sharing is to translate projection into identification. Sometimes that identification can be overwhelming. Classically, the feelings are spoken, fears are shared, embraces offered. If feelings are overwhelming and 'unspeakable', this can feel awkward, difficult and anxiety-provoking. I would argue that group safety is created by the group boundary.

Director James, I can see that you are struggling with something very difficult. We have 10 minutes to help you with this.

A time-limited space has been clarified. To some it may feel that a sense of restriction has been imposed. This response might point to an issue of transference – an issue that needs time and patience to untease. Or an issue of countertransference may arise – the director unwittingly seeing an aspect of self in the client. By keeping to the clarity of the boundary, James is given a choice, handed the power to act, from which further work can emerge.

James I have just realised how much I *hate* my sister.

It has been spoken. There is some release.

It may be tempting for the director to think: 'Ah! Perhaps we can help James with this.' It could be that James is invited to look at this issue. Indeed it can tumble into an entire new psychodrama. While this is at one level laudable, the psychodramatist is at risk of becoming omnipotent – fixing all, saving all, working it all out – and needing, through personal anxiety, to make things safe. The capacity to direct can be over-used – perhaps unconsciously – to impress, to establish esteem or to overcome a dynamic or unconscious anxiety. All directors are exposed to such forces. He/she may step into a countertransference

phenomenon where he/she is responding to the client as if he/she was the client. The client may represent an aspect of the director that is unclear or indeed unknown. In the example with James, the director may unconsciously identify with him as 'the helpless child' or 'the deserted brother' and prepare to direct as a result of that dynamic rather than for James's expressed need.

It may be that it was because the group was ending and separation was imminent that James was able to get in touch with this issue that moved him so deeply. Perhaps the group and/or director represented the sister that did constantly desert him. This is where quiet, reflective clarification through sharing and talking can promote self-understanding within the boundaries of self-empowerment. It may be helpful for James to make a statement of intent – to acknowledge work to be done as well as a closure of the work in the here and now.

James I feel very angry and I need to understand why I react to my sister in this way.

The director must therefore always monitor in him/herself a personal response to the sharing process and needs to be able to discuss it in a supervisory setting.

What if James has no release and is still struggling after 10 minutes? Although it may be tempting to extend the time boundaries 'to help', it is important for the director to think through this scenario in order to be 'prepared'. There are several possible options:

- negotiate a time extension with the group
- spend time with James individually after the group
- ask group members to spend time with him after the session
- ask James to take responsibility for his distress and return to the group to explore his difficulties.

Of course, the context in which the session has taken place may point to the best course of action for the director. In a residential setting, this situation will feel more manageable as the group can sit with him, providing support as needed. Things are very different when this happens, say, at the end of a public workshop where the director has been working without the continuity of further contact. Whatever the context it helps to embrace basic psychotherapeutic principles:

- always remain mindful of time
- closure for each session is important work
- the director needs to keep to the boundaries negotiated in order to help the group members reclothe
- the director puts in place safety nets for the safety of group members and to reduce anxiety for the director.

Psychodramatists, as a matter of professional conduct, need to make it their

responsibility to have access to contact points for the group participants outside the psychodrama session – next of kin, sister, friend, general practitioner, to promote and if necessary provide a safety net for the interface between the psychodrama session and the outside world. Sound, safe practice will reduce the director's anxieties which in turn will produce more creative and professional thinking.

So, in James's case, what is safe sensible professional practice? Depending on the context in which we meet him, there are points to consider:

- In a residential, hospital setting or clinic, consult with other staff involved in his care, to provide a team approach.
- In a residential, psychodrama setting, ensure plenty of time for closure. A whole day is never too long to say goodbye. Intense feelings of bonding and sharing develop over such times, with emotional regression and a relinquishment of outside responsibilities. Reclamation of personal integrity and power through the course of saying goodbye is a very important process needing time and sensitivity. James would need that time.
- During a weekend workshop, it is tempting to pack in too much, to meet everybody's needs. Have closure in mind from the beginning of the last day for the reasons stated above.
- In an out-patient group remind him that the group is available the following week and that he is in the throes of important work.
- assess whether consultation with others is appropriate.

These decisions may raise all sorts of difficult and uncomfortable feelings which need extensive work and discussion in supervision. For the purpose of this chapter, the director needs to make the sharing safe enough and extend their professional practice to provide a sense of containment and safety for all concerned.

RESISTANT OR DIFFICULT SHARING

'Gosh, that was a good group! Everybody was crying at the end!' Too often, psychodrama groups can be 'judged' by the depth of sharing. Too often, psychodramatists' esteem is raised or dashed by the same phenomenon. Although it is important to embrace the importance of catharsis, and the sharing of distressing and sad feelings, thoughtful, silent reflection can be as therapeutic. Sometimes the sharing can be tense or uncomfortable. Group members are unable to speak, say what they think or feel, leaving a sense of awkwardness and lack of resolution. The reasons for this may be manifold. Perhaps the theme of the drama was awkwardness; perhaps the issues raised are too painful to voice or indeed buried too deep to be understood. Dalmiro Bustos, the Brazilian psychoanalyst and psychodramatist, has often said: 'the greater the resistance, the greater the pain' (personal communication). So, the task of the director is to reflect with the group

and struggle to understand the nature of the difficulty or resistance. A comment may be helpful:

Director I am wondering if we all feel a bit bewildered by John's description of home.

or

Director Perhaps there was something uncomfortable about what Fred was saying.

Certainly, it is important that the director's esteem does not rely on the group making it alright. The director needs to remember that part of the task of the group is to act as a container or hold discomfort, uncertainty, ambivalence until such time as those feelings can be worked on. Many people may never have had such an opportunity.

I remember a client who was always silent, even awkward at the end of each session, unable to communicate verbally. My assumption could well have been that he was getting very little from the group and that I was in some way failing him.

In those moments, that notion can be translated into a projected response – i.e. *he* is failing me and therefore a waste of time – and a negative, therapeutic response can set in. In fact, this same man, on the last day of the group, was noted to be wearing an uncharacteristically flamboyant tie and was heard to say to a friend that the group had been a very significant experience in his life. Working with difficult feelings is a vital part of the therapeutic work and facilitating the sharing through difficult times is essential.

Dr Donald Winnicott (1971: 43), in his renowned book *Playing and Reality*, describes this point very well. He says:

> It did not seem to me at the end of this session that one could claim that the work of the previous session had had a profound effect. On the other hand, I was only too aware of the great danger of becoming confident or even pleased. The analyst's neutrality was needed here if anywhere in the whole treatment. In this kind of work we know that we are always starting again, and the less we expect the better.

CONCLUSION

So, the task of the sharing phase in a psychodrama group is to provide a safe space for the group members to voice their feelings, thoughts and identifications with the protagonist and other group members and to share the experience of the group process. With the help of the director, what is unconscious can be made

conscious and what is projected, claimed, acknowledged and worked with in order to continue the journey towards change.

To quote Winnicott again:

> Psychotherapy takes place in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the playing and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together. The corollary of this is that where playing is not possible, then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play.
>
> (Winnicott 1971: 44)

The importance of the sharing is to be able to bring the whole group together into 'a state of being able to play'.

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