

## AFFECTS

System builders have been impressed with **Drives**. It is almost as if human beings were inert, like balls on a pool table, till something gives them a push. When the source of the push has been construed in biological terms, we feel we are on firm, familiar ground. The psychosomatic experiences of hunger, thirst, bloated bladders and sleepiness come readily to mind, for everyone responds to excesses or deficiencies in these areas in such a way as to reduce the tension they cause. Generally, the reduction of tension brings pleasure and the increase of tension produces pain. Our tendency to act accordingly is what Freudians call the **pleasure principle**.

This kind of explanation has broad generality, for it applies equally well to animals as to human beings, sometimes better. But when civilization works as it should the relative importance of drives in human beings as an explanatory principle fades rapidly, such that we are only minimally aware of hunger and thirst. Satisfaction of these drives is so dependable and predictable that only in catastrophic situations are consideration of the drives of any value in understanding and predicting behavior.

The drives are like giant flywheels which keep the machinery going, but remain remote from the control center which determines what shall be done, how, when and where. I ask you, how often do drive states surface in your psycho-dramas? When was the last time you fell back upon a drive centered explanation for understanding what was happening in a protagonist? Rarely? That's what I thought.

I would not be so foolish as to deny the existence of homeostatic drives, or to pretend that they lack value as biological explanations. I maintain, however, that their use in psychology is confined to situations fortunately uncommon to most members of our society. While it is obvious that differences in temperament make for differences in available energy or output, when we know an individual's style, the individual's level operates almost as a constant.

Thereafter I can recognize one's energy level as a kind of baseline, and must look elsewhere for explanations of why one does this rather than that. Most, if not all psycho-dramatists conceptualize in terms of **pulls** rather than **pushes**. We are ever reaching out to this or that target, object, goal or person. It is as if we were borne on a stream, where our attention focuses on going here rather than there. When we are fully functioning, it seems to be our nature to channel activities one way or another. This is what interests human beings --- and psycho-dramatists. It's much closer to where we live.

There is a conceptual framework system builders have recognized, but the importance of which they've under-estimated. I refer to the **affects**. These have long been regarded as the communicative and behavioral expressions of drive. Affects are felt subjectively and expressed nonverbally. They let us know where we---and others stand. Is it a coincidence that therapists are ever asking clients, "How do you feel?" Here psychodramatists have the edge, for we have gotten the protagonist off the couch and out of the chair onto the stage where we have an unobstructed view of an eloquent nonverbal self-presentation.

Those who find themselves at a loss to adequately represent personal processes in abstract language very readily find the words needed to describe situations life has thrust upon protagonists. People ever act and react, not simply to therapists, but with respect to whatever in the environment holds reality for them. We see individuals move toward doing something and something else slowing them down, holding them back. We anticipate what a person may do next as we read face and muscles, and hear how the person experiences what is happening.

In what follows I am indebted to S.S. Tomkins. See *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness, Volumes I, II, III, IV*. New York: Springer Publishing Company. As I present his taxonomy of affects, I believe you will find yourself in familiar territory. Isn't this the kind of thing you look for as a director of psychodramas?

There are **positive affects**, expressed as continua:

- 1) From Interest to **Excitement**,
- 2) From **Enjoyment** (e.g. a smile) to **Joy**.

There are 'resetting' affects, whereby we drop what we've been doing to take a look:

- 3) From **Surprise** to **Startle**.

And there are **negative affects**: From

- 4) **Fear/Anxiety** to Terror. Schizophrenia is a terror thing.
- 5) From **Anger** to **Rage**. Though we place them on the same continuum, they are farther apart than most others we consider here. Psychodramatists teach people to fight in such a way that they may have hope of winning.
- 6) From **Distress** to **Anguish**. These are intense and painful, but not as frightening
- 7) From **Shame** (e.g. shyness) to **Humiliation**. This is one of Tomkin's distinctive contributions, **the Humiliation Complex**, which includes two primary affects, on the one hand shame and humiliation and on the other, contempt and disgust. They relate to the self. If you feel self-disgust as an adult, you also feel shame. In schizophrenia there is not only the terror problem, but the humiliation problem also. One dare not look at oneself.
- 8) And as we've alluded to above, from **Contempt** to **Disgust** (e.g. vomiting). Something has happened we wished hadn't happened. Those who've not received gratification and recognition at an early age are vulnerable to humiliation. Feeling contempt/disgust they assume they have something rotten 'inside' which must be gotten rid of. (Later Tomkins included **Dissmell** among innate affects here)

Indeed, criminals commit crimes because of how they were treated as children, but the mechanism involved is not simple revenge. These children were treated that way because *in the reigning opinion about them they were rotten*, which they themselves come to feel and believe, and as adults, they behave true to form.

For every child requires in growing up persons to admire or identify with, and others mirror back to the child, who he or she is. Interpersonal relationships call for both sameness and novelty. Sameness fosters recognition and recognition brings rewards, but novelty renders relationships interesting. With both relationships continue.

Let's see how the focus on affects helps. We cannot explain depression entirely on the basis of anger turned inward. Depression on the neurotic level yields to **distress/anguish**, but in psychoses it becomes impoverishment. To blot out the painful affect, we miss data we need for a full life. Improvement may come through **letting out the pain** a little at a time.

So what is the value of repeating affects in psychodrama? As they come into consciousness, we label them, validate them, and receive group acceptance. Even the simple representation of an old scene transforms, so that the protagonists can no longer be where they once were. We may designate this an **abreactive catharsis**. It is far beyond passively watching scenes on TV or in the movies. Rarely does this reach catharsis. More likely it's **learning**. But in the psychodrama one learns it is OK to have a strong affect. The task becomes choosing and implementing the given affect in such a way as to get what we want.

In conceptualizing feeling we recognize three areas:

- 1) the autonomic system, consisting of sympathetic and parasympathetic subsystems.
- 2) the facial muscles (in conjunction with the eyes, major organs of communication). Stimulating a single nerve calls forth a complex reaction. Later Tomkins came to believe the skin surface of the face was the crucial factor in this, responding with slight changes in temperature.
- 3) the brain.

There is no such thing as an affectless idea, he insisted, and as such ideas have consequences. Harry S. Sullivan observed that when one feels he lives among pigs, there is not a whole lot of incentive to be the least among the pigs. The psychodrama tradition inclines our heads heavenward. We have always espoused a **high view** of mankind. Moreno proclaimed the highest!

Emphasis on affects gives us great flexibility of explanation. Affects are **amplifiers** of drives, but they are also capable of masking drive impulses, and even functioning independently of drives altogether. Tomkins argues:

*This (affect) system is the primary provider of blueprints for cognition, decision and action. The human being's ability to duplicate and reproduce himself is guaranteed not only by a responsiveness to drive signals, but by a responsiveness to what-ever circumstances activate positive and negative affect. Some of the triggers to interest, joy, startle, disgust, aggression, fear and shame are unlearned. At the same time the affect system is capable of being instigated by learned stimuli....(One) is born biased toward and away from a limited set of circumstances and is also capable of learning to acquire new objects of interest (p22).*

Bear in mind there are many 'instigators' to any particular affect, and likewise there are many releasers of that same affect. The baby cries for many reasons, and quits crying for many reasons. In sum, there are **many/one** relationships regarding instigation, and there are **one/many** relationships for maintenance and reduction. This opens the door, of course, to error, but that is a small price to pay for such flexibility. Remember the Moreno definition of spontaneity.

### **Some Psychodrama Tactics for Coping with Shame and Humiliation**

We haven't the space to go into the whole spectrum of affects. I've commented on Anger elsewhere. See the chapter on the context of anger in *Lift Up Your Head and Breathe 1998*. Also on Fear and Anxiety. See chapter 4 of *Scripts and Counterscripts, 1998*. Here we shall make a few brief comments on shame and humiliation so that you may capitalize on recognizing that this is indeed the affect predominating in the protagonist before you.

Parents are often shocked to find so much shame in their children, when they can recall having done nothing to produce it. Here is, not a whole psychodrama, but a fictional series of scenes which may provide a window to what has happened to the protagonist.

- 1) A child pushes around another, because he thinks he can. He may or may not be angry. The target may be afraid, or simply not want to bother, so he backs off. No big deal. The frustrated bully calls him a 'sissy,' and that shames him. Some run, but others stand their ground and fight.
- 2) When the boy goes home, his mother can see he's been in a fight. You can hear her say, *I tried to raise you to be a gentleman, but here you go fighting like you came from the gutter.* It's enough to bring a little boy to tears.

is in a far better position to deal with her accuser. She may even be at liberty to discover that the identification figure no longer treats her in the way she once did, that she has immortalized a ghost from the past, who no longer belongs in the present personal situation. Having recognized her, she now has the option of letting her go and substituting another image of her own choosing, conceivably even a more up-to-date version of the same person. We encourage a protagonist to build a composite of one's own from the more admirable fragments of other persons. Thus the protagonist triumphs.

To ever refer back to interpersonal relationships is a favorite psychodrama director ploy for making sense of protagonist's lives, but beware. One may feel shame for something where we can discover no shamer.

Suppose the protagonist exerts every effort toward achieving something but fails. Let's say he impulsively does the very thing he believes to be wrong, to play fast and loose with his own standards. Religious persons may imagine God has shamed them. Here's the psychodramatist's response:

The director asks the protagonist to imagine God in the empty chair. The protagonist addresses God. Then we send the protagonist to the God chair in order to hear what God's reply is to the protagonist. We slip the protagonist's double into the chair just vacated to receive 'God's message.' The strange thing is this, that when the religious protagonist fills the God chair, the Deity becomes more flexible than the protagonist was from her own chair. Directors can even gain concessions, through raising questions like *Isn't God better than the best person you know? Don't you know persons who'd cut you more slack, be nicer to you, show more compassion...etc.* We undercut the unhealthy image of God which has helped maintain the image of oneself as shameful. We create a way for protagonists' religion to work for them rather than against them. What believer would take exception to that?

Here's another common source of shame. If we're especially vulnerable, and try to get through to someone important to us, but who is preoccupied, we come to feel we're getting in the way. Though this may not occur to the other person, we feel shamed. How often this happens with parenting figures, employers and spouses. So the protagonist feels neglected or abandoned.

We each have a social atom, those few persons with whom we closely identify, and one of those persons does something which, if I'd have done it, I'd feel shame. So now, vicariously, I feel the shame--though the other may have wanted something very different from me.

I may be sensitive to another's attempt to shame me. Even though I might have felt no shame otherwise I feel shame out of my perception of his or her intention that I be shamed. Take the ambitious parent of a teen, who reacts negatively to the report card at hand. The teen had been quite satisfied, even grateful, but because of the parental reaction, she feels ashamed.

The attitudes of others, together with their impact on me, prove to be among the many complex sources of shame. Pertinent to therapy here is locating the source. That done, the psychodrama director easily addresses the situation.

Childhood experience of any negative affect, but especially shame, may broaden or deepen over time, to the point where we find ourselves dealing with what Tomkins calls the **snowball effect**. Or subsequent experience may cover over the childhood negative experience. Nevertheless, the adult remains vulnerable to selective intrusions, called the **iceberg effect**.

On the other hand, not all childhood experiences of being shamed have had such drastic results. Most adults have benefited from compensatory experiences resolving or diluting the more adverse impact of shaming.

The protagonist's apparent affect is the director's first clue to what may be going on, and helps guide the therapist's initial interview questions. Protagonist self-description may reinforce or contradict the body language. Each affect suggests a small range of plots as possibilities, some of which may be eliminated with a question or two, while the real issue emerges with greater clarity in the process. The magic shop offers a surplus reality way in.

- 3) Enter father. Such a display of weakness disgusts him. He says, *I can hardly believe you're my son. Don't be such a baby?*
- 4) At dinnertime, the boy faces mushy tasteless squash. With an *ugh!* and a grimace, he pushes it to one side. A parent berates him for *making faces* at dinner. He's told *We don't do this in our family.*
- 5) At last comes the entre, roast turkey. Gleefully he reaches for the slices of white meat, only to be shot down sharply, and rapped on the hand. He pulls back and lowers his head in shame.
- 6) His posture offends his parents. They are appalled at his slumping, and demand he *Sit up!* He 'knuckles under' but retreats into himself, sitting rigidly in place.
- 7) Is that all? No. He gets it for saying nothing.

I have constructed the above from an example given in Tomkins (Volume II, page 230). But this is mild. Your clinical experience surely provides more extreme examples of the training for shame your patients have suffered.

The reflexive character of shame opens the door to the psychodrama director's intervention. Rollo May interpreted Soren Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death* in terms of anxiety, but reference to the opening paragraphs of that book should convince any open-minded reader that Kierkegaard is speaking of shame. Shame is the most self-conscious of all the affects, so much so that the phenomenological distinction between shame's subject and shame's object blurs. Shame draws attention from self and others to one's own face, and focally the eyes. Shame relates directly to sense of identity.

Often I call for an intrapsychic scene in the psychodrama, where I remind the protagonist that she is a witness or monitor to all she does. I place her in a chair representing the monitoring role and I put her double directly across from her, designating the double as herself hearing the monitor's comment on what she's been doing. Thus one becomes the accuser of oneself. This is the reflexive action outside observers miss.

When the protagonist as monitor accuses, I call for role reversal. First we hear the double as accuser deliver the same message, and then we find how the protagonist gives account of herself to herself. Sometimes, in view of what has already taken place in the psychodrama, I may intensify the protagonist's experience in the defendant role. When, after a few lively interchanges, I sometimes ask, *How old are you?* If the protagonist is well into the scene, she will not answer with her current age, but refer to a much earlier self, usually a child self.

I reinforce the perception by halting the interaction with the adult self, and interview her in the role reversed position as the child of such and such years. Then I reverse her back to her adult self. Now we are ready for the question, as I point to the double sitting across from her, *If this were any other child, would you be so harsh on her? Think of any other child you know as if she were there before you. Now let's hear you say what should be said to this child here.*

When at last she does so, we're ready to reverse her back to hear the revised message. Now she hears it, as coming from herself to herself. For the first time she may be free to modify her own behavior as she senses group acceptance of her as she is. I take her back to the monitor role to reinforce the modified presentation. We do as many subsequent role reversals as the situation seems to require. We end with a handshake (as with those who seal contracts) or a hug (as with those who freely love), either of which may serve as closing symbols of the integration achieved.

There is a possibility one may come to recognize in the adult accusatory role an identification figure. If time allows, I call on the protagonist to be that person, do an interview to fix the perception and to prepare someone present to take that auxiliary role. With the identification figure properly identified the protagonist