

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF A PSYCHODRAMA DEMONSTRATION

1. The role of the audience member at a psychodrama demonstration differs fundamentally from that of an audience member at a drama. At a drama the actors are there to entertain, but in psychodrama the audience is there to help the protagonist find fulfillment. Your being-there implies you are willing to accept the responsibility of coming onto the stage, if you should happen to be called upon. The protagonist risks open-ness with you. How can you do less than risk yourself for him?

2. Don't assume as the session progresses that the protagonist continues with an acute sense of exposure to the group, for early in the psychodrama the protagonist loses sight of the group in favor of his own overwhelming personal concerns. Of course he knows the group is still there, but its presence is background, not in focus. Ongoing interactions, first with the director and later with auxiliaries, gives the protagonist the feeling he is not alone in this venture. But he is never under pressure to be anything other than who he is. Unlike the professional dramatic actor, he can do no wrong.

3. Let go of the observer standpoint. If this is your first psychodrama, set out to experience the protagonist's world from the protagonist's point-of-view. Even better, be the protagonist, if you can. As you come to appreciate the protagonist, imagine yourself playing the other roles you see being enacted on stage. If you were called upon to take a role, would you be ready? As you gain more experience, you may come to second-guess the director's next step. Not an easy task for beginners. Obviously, one must experience many psychodramas to experience psychodrama. Experience approaches the maximum as you, over a period of time, risk playing the roles of protagonist, auxiliary, double and director.

4. Some psychodramas call forth a display of fireworks. More do not. The freedom to release pent-up feeling comes more readily to some than to others. If your journey with the protagonist seems arid, resist the tendency to let the mind wander. You may miss seeing how the director responds to the challenge and orchestrates the production, showing deep concern for the protagonist's feelings, rather than whether you are seeing what you had expected to see when you came. Stay with the psychodrama and suddenly you may find yourself taken by surprise at a quick change of tempo. But whether that happens or not, the needs of the protagonist come first. The director has future psychodramas in view, psychodramas where the protagonist open up at last, once having learned here that his limits will be respected.

5. Note how the director protects the protagonist from the impatience of others. Protagonists are blind to matters obvious to onlookers, for the good reason that they need to be! When someone in the audience forgets his function, seeking to impress one and all with his keen insight, the director cuts him short before the protagonist's precarious

balance has been disrupted. Chances are that the intruder's observation was correct, but the intruder himself was profoundly incorrect in thrusting his comment on the protagonist. Discoveries have their time. Premature observations or interpretations may create inordinate delays in the protagonist's growth.

6. The psychodrama may or may not solve the protagonist's problem. His initial concern may be but the "tip of the iceberg." Some psychodramas remain at the tip, while others plunge to the depths, but plunging is not necessarily the better course. Learn to look beyond the so-called problem to the person in the midst of his relationships. Forego the search for the villain. Fault-finding is futile, unhelpful and unnecessary, even when prompted by sympathy for the protagonist. You are not likely to experience others from the protagonist's world as he does. Later on, if you should happen to meet any such persons, you'd probably find them quite different from what you had expected, not because the protagonist has misrepresented them, but because you are not the protagonist. You have not been conditioned by his history. Nor do you present the same stimulus value for them as he does.

7. Respect the protagonist's privacy. Discuss the particulars of this psychodrama only with persons who were there with you, and take care that you are not overheard. When someone asks, "How was the psychodrama?" reply in terms of your own feelings as much as you like, but please shield the identity of the protagonist. Breaking confidentiality is a major violation of humanity and stark evidence of your irresponsibility and immaturity, to say the least.

8. If no two protagonists are identical, neither are directors. Directors bring their own rich and unique backgrounds to bear upon the situation before them, highlighting this and letting-go of that, hovering over the process as it develops, nudging the protagonist now and then, raising questions, testing answers -- all the while conveying the impression he shall be with the protagonist, wherever he goes. The director-protagonist relationship is the prime relationship of the psychodrama, opening the door to vast possibilities but at the same time closing the door to others. Two equally competent directors may produce quite different psychodramas with the same protagonist working on the same problem (if that were ever possible). The psychodrama you have seen then, is as unique as history. So if you critique psychodrama, consider not only the same director with a series of protagonists, but the same protagonist with a series of directors. The opportunity for this sort of evaluation comes only to those who frequent institutes, who have already been convinced under much less rigorous conditions. The longer you refrain from concluding, the more likely you are to be impressed with the value of what is before you.

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