

The Process of De-roling by Ann E. Hale, M.A., TEP

Your personal growth group has asked you about the process of de-roling which you introduced after a psychodrama you directed involving release of anger, strong conflict and abusive language. Share how you directed de-roling and what rationale you gave for it.

Introduction

One of the ways people sort out who they are, who they have become over time, is through examining life events which have shaped their beliefs, attitudes, internal dialogue and the patterns of choices which direct most of their actions. What may occur on an unconscious level is the creation of a "situational transference" or the adaptation of an event happening in the here and now filtered through a memory of a familiar scene, offering an opportunity to once again handle the situation in the same way, or to challenge oneself to make changes; The individual sees and addresses the aspects of the scene which best fit the elements they need for either completion or repetition. The person drops out of their awareness aspects which don't fit the former reality. The ascribing of roles to other individuals, outside of therapeutic contexts, is without the person's knowledge. A role, and the attributes related to the role, is projected in order to accomplish a change, or solidify a previously held position. As people grow to adulthood we begin to sense when we are the subject of projection. We report "not feeling seen" or "de-personalization", such as in the case of being lumped into a composite of "authority figures" or other role clusters, such as "mother hen" or "religious freak".

Psychodrama is a method which actively encourages the use of projection, within the context of "exploring the truth using dramatic methods" and with the permission of persons who take on the role "in the service of the developing ego". Moreno called these supportive group members "auxiliary egos". Being active in a role for therapeutic benefit is time limited. It is a common practice for the director to facilitate an auxiliary ego to portray the role as shown, and to further investigate the role, expand on the role, enlarging on and fully expressing the role, and to be part of the closure phase with the role played. Upon completion of the dramatic scenes, the director facilitates "de-roling" of the auxiliary egos, the staging and props and even him or herself as the director.

De-roling methods

The shift from psychodramatic reality to on-going life reality is accomplished through stages of closure. One stage is resolution of the issue during the closing action. This assists with lessening of tension raised

by more volatile action, and the opportunity for persons in the audience to begin closure and lessening their own tensions. Next, scenes are closed, and the protagonist and director return to the group space, sometimes being seated near one another and "off stage". There may be a de-roling phase introduced at this point, or the sharing phase may begin, with attention to de-roling as part of the sharing and/or role feedback given by the auxiliary egos.

The de-roling is designed to assist the protagonist in acknowledging the auxiliary ego and to help the protagonist begin to relate to that person as they are in life and no longer occupying a role in the protagonist's life. The de-roling is also designed to assist all group members in removing the projection placed on auxiliary egos during the enactment, and to return to the person their own identity. The director has been focused more intently on the protagonist's process and this closure phase is the director's opportunity to re-acquaint him or herself with the entire group and whatever needs they have to bring to a close the projective process of the psychodrama.

Using action to accomplish de-roling

I like to have persons who played major roles engage in a brief encounter with the role they had in the enactment. An empty chair is placed before the person who had been in the role and they are asked to make closing statements to the role they played. As this is for the entire group's benefit, the chair is placed in such a way as to allow full view of the former auxiliary ego during their brief enactment. This enactment allows the auxiliary ego the opportunity to complete unfinished business they have with the role and to separate themselves from the role. The protagonist, and any person present who is still holding the projected role in their unconscious is helped to transition to the person engaged in an enactment as oneself. Making this conscious gives a place in the process for "return to self". Part of this action is to check with the protagonist and the group and ask, "Do you now experience this person standing before you as _____ (name their name)?"

I have observed psychodramatists engage in a ritual of "brushing off" the role by the protagonist. This may be a useful symbolic ritual; however, it does not accomplish removal of the unconscious projection which may still exist for other group members present during the drama. A further benefit of the de-roling is to clear a space for future role selection in order that this type of role, demanding this form of expression, is freely accessible to all group members, and no longer fixed or associated with this particular group member.

De-roling following sociodrama

A purpose of sociodrama is to expand one's experience of roles foreign to one's own role repertoire. Each person who has encountered a new role might confront the role in an empty chair, and state the learning, and the possibilities that may be taken in the future. As each person divests him or

herself from the role, an acknowledgement is made of what has been taken in from the role. Also a statement of commitment is made, for example, to be more aware, more active in ways which relate to the concerns raised in the sociodrama.

Clearing energy fields, an extension of de-roling

There is a growing body of knowledge about the energy fields related to emotion, emotional outbursts, and "toxic waste" which can be generated in therapeutic work. It is worth investigating the subject.¹ Some people use chanting or phrases, smudging with sage or sweet grass to clear energy around bodies, or spraying cedar water to clear energy still residing in buildings or outdoor spaces. The approaches and substances used vary with geographic location and belief systems. Susan Aaron, a psychodramatist and originator of Psychodramatic Bodywork[®] suggests persons who have picked up body sensations, feel ill, weak or tired following therapeutic work, state firmly "Not Mine!" If the sensations go away then personal energy will be restored. If the sensation does not go away there is more likely that the therapeutic work triggered a body memory and a person is urged to pursue the sensation to a source scene.²

¹ I have used "clearing energy fields" to explore this topic on the internet.

² Aaron, Susan.(2003) Psychodramatic Bodywork: A Manual Toronto, Ontario Canada, Susan Aaron Workshops. (www.youremotions.com)

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