

## THE SELF DISCLOSURE ASPECT OF THE PSYCHODRAMA SHARING SESSION

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"Incomplete terminations interfere with new beginnings."

—CARL HOLLANDER

Self disclosure has become an increasingly important area of empirical investigation in the behavioral sciences and area of exploration in the human potential movement. It is seen now as a variable which "mediates" a vast number of other seemingly unrelated variables such as communication accuracy, interpersonal perception, group cohesiveness, self concept, and confirmation. Inaccessible for description and experimentation until recently, self disclosure is now available to researchers and methodologists for development. A minimal accumulation of theory exists regarding self disclosure, but considerable data is being gathered currently, and it is anticipated that substantive research will aid in the formulation of theory.

Culbert (1968) has defined self disclosure as an individual's "... explicitly communicating to one or more others some personal information that others would be unlikely to acquire unless he himself discloses it." Culbert explained that the information must be "personally private," that is, it must be of such a nature that it is not something the individual normally would disclose to anyone who might happen to inquire about it. Of course, what is "personally private" for one may not be for another for a number of reasons.

Self disclosure is thought to differ from self description in that self description designates self data that an individual feels relatively free to reveal to most others. It includes information which an individual knows about himself and which may be readily perceivable to others, and by which he consents to be known such as marital status, occupation, physical characteristics, etc. By definition, self disclosure requires the presence of others or it becomes "self information." Normally self information precedes self disclosure.

Jourard (1964, 1968) is the name that dominates the literature on self disclosure. Working alone or in conjunction with others, he has explored the area in some depth. Jourard has been responsible for the development of a reliable 60 item instrument for the assessment of self disclosure and for considerable demographic testing.

In his book *The Transparent Self* (1964) Jourard has made some observations about self disclosure that are pertinent to the understanding of the

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phenomenon. He says that the way to know oneself is to disclose that self to others. Meaning that one knows himself best through others and how they respond to him. If he discloses himself authentically, he gets that authenticity responded to; he sees the results of showing his "real self." A person who does not reveal himself to others gets this lack of disclosure responded to and grows more and more "out of touch" with the self. An individual who presents a "false self" gets the falseness responded to and receives the impression that others do not really know him. Others can know a person only to the extent that he discloses himself and can respond accurately only to the extent that they are provided with authentic data.

The results of much of the research in self disclosure seems sociometrically significant, and much of the analysis of the results seems pertinent to the understanding and practice of psychodrama. A protagonist in the midst of an enactment repeatedly makes decisions about the extent of his self disclosure. Disclosure is often the theme of a psychodrama. When the enactment is completed and the sharing session begins, the very substance of what is shared is constituted of self disclosure.

During the sharing session, each person has the potential for experiencing the relief of having harbored a secret and being able to reveal it in front of others and be provided with their responses. This usually results in being unburdened by the secret and at the same time discovering that others are not repelled by the disclosure of it. That instead of becoming less acceptable to the group for having said it, one may very well become more acceptable for having it disclosed.

Clearly, psychodrama is not only for the protagonist but for the auxiliaries and audience as well. Group members vicariously work out some of their own difficulties by relating to the psychodramatic experience of another person. In the sharing session, each person has an opportunity to integrate the action on the stage with his own experience. In a sense, he takes part of the psychodramatic action and incorporates it into his own life, and at the same time offers something of his experience to the group. In the giving, each person depletes himself of the "personal" character of what is revealed and enriches himself with the "universal character" of what the others have shared.

The sharing session allows the joining of group members' past experiences with the past experiences of the protagonist which were enacted as if in the present. The group members can come to appreciate which of their own past experiences are still unresolved or incomplete to the extent that they are activated by the psychodrama. The psychodrama has the potential for re-awakening troubled areas and past difficulties of group members. These unresolved difficulties may be revealed in the sharing session and provide the substance for future psychodramas.

Each group member undergoes some self confrontation during the enactment of another person's psychodrama. He confronts: (1) "How is this similar to

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my own experience?" and (2) "How would I handle this same situation?" In this way, each psychodrama generates other potential psychodramas providing the sharing session facilitates the transformation from identification to presentation to enactment. A potential protagonist who is not allowed to disclose may never enact. A potential protagonist who is allowed to "talk it out" may not feel the need for enactment. The sharing session provides the crucial interim for getting the protagonist down off the stage and back into the group and for getting another group member out of the audience and onto the stage.

Zerka Moreno has said that during an enactment, a protagonist psychologically denudes himself of previous concealment and exposes himself to group view. When the enactment is over, the protagonist has to return to the group nude. He needs to be clothed with the same type of disclosure that he has divested himself of. During the sharing session, each person has an opportunity to participate in the psychological clothing of the protagonist. Each person "clothes" by taking something of his own emotional makeup and providing the protagonist with it. Sometimes an abundance of sharing leaves each person in the group emotionally exposed, but provides an abundance of emotional clothing to be "tried on for size" and worn out of the room. The protagonist who has departed from the group for his enactment is allowed reentry into the group to the extent that the disclosure in sharing is similar in proportion and nature to the disclosure in the enactment. The protagonist has given and needs to be given back to. Giving back broadens the experience, making it more common and more universal.

Each person has different tolerance and capability for sharing. Each person gives what he is able to part with. A person who cannot relate to the enactment can share why he is unable to relate. However, if a person seems repeatedly unable to relate it is more likely that he is threatened and unable to disclose.

Generally speaking a new group member will be threatened by a group he joins, even if all of the other group members are new also. What a new group member is most threatened by is that he will be damaged or exploited. These threats or fears usually diminish in an atmosphere of sharing.

As persons share, each becomes more distinct, human, believable, and vulnerable. With sharing, barriers come down, cohesiveness grows, and anonymity diminishes. Each person establishes himself in the group with strengths, weaknesses, problems, flaws, imperfections, capabilities, and untapped resources revealed. As each person becomes more known, each person becomes less formidable, less isolated, less ambiguous, and less threatening. Instead, he becomes more sharply defined, more sympathetic, more supportive, and more in accord with each other member of the group.

Part of the "bonding effect" that becomes apparent during the sharing session results from a group awareness of the commonality of their experience. Although it is true that each of us is different, it is also true that we are all

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alike in many ways and can identify and empathize with the psychodramatic experience of another. Because of our own backgrounds we can "understand" the experience another undergoes and can relate it to our own. As perceived differences between group members diminish through shared experiences and threat of damage or exploitation diminishes, closer personal relationships emerge. There appear even to be some "universal themes" enacted in psychodramas that virtually everyone present in the group can relate to in one way or another.

The sharing session also reemphasizes the group therapy nature of psychodrama. It reminds us that some other group has sickened or inflicted damage on the protagonist, but that the present group is capable of curing the sickness or healing the wounds. Optimum effectiveness in psychodrama requires the presence of a group and necessitates the effective utilization of the sharing session.

A poorly done psychodrama is likely to produce a poor sharing session evidenced by confused personal identification, guarded tentative comments, lack of insight, generalized coldness and distance, minimum self disclosure, and group disintegration. It is also likely that an effectively done sharing session will generate a number of good psychodramas because it will serve to prepare potential protagonists for eventual enactment by initiating their disclosure for the group.

Satisfying sharing tends to be of three kinds: (1) "This is something that I *have shared* with you." (That I went through again with you in your psychodrama.) (2) "This is something that I *can share* with you." (That I have not yet shared, but need to say to give you something of myself for what you've given me.) (3) "This is something that *you shared* with me." (This is something I got for myself out of what you went through.) Naturally there are combinations of the three.

One seemingly innocent version of sharing is: "I have gone through that too." (But I have worked it all out and am done with it.) This last statement may be genuine and sincere, but it can also represent what might be termed "pseudo-sharing," or sharing that allows an individual to say something in the group, but still remain superior to the protagonist and separate from the group, an individual without the same needs or difficulties that other group members may have.

Analysis, advice, judgment, and moralizing are non-sharing. They reveal nothing of the self. They contribute nothing to the ongoing aspect of the group growth or development. Such pronouncements, however wise or true, tend to "place periods where there should be commas" and close down matters which might profitably remain open. No group member should be placed in a position where he may evaluate another.

That which is divulged during sharing sessions is usually thought to be "group property" and is ideally available for the group to incorporate for the

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personal growth of each of its members. This would hold true for the person who shared the information or feelings. Whatever is said honestly ought to be responded to honestly, dealt with honestly, and utilized honestly. When it is used in another psychodrama or processing session, care ought to be taken by the director to assure the giver of the information that the use of the information is descriptive or interpretative rather than judgmental.

The sharer himself has a highly subjective view of the significance of the information that he has shared. It may be accurate, but it may also be distorted or highly value laden. It would be an error to accept the description or conclusions of the sharer about his own experience without testing that experience in a psychodrama. One should not be too quick to conclude about the nature of a difficulty of a protagonist because of his description of it in a previous sharing session.

The sharing session provides a "warming down" period for the protagonist, the auxiliaries, and the audience. It is a "psychological breathing space" which allows each person to get out of his own individual mental psychodrama and rejoin the group. After a particularly compelling or cathartic session, it "wrenches" a group mentally and emotionally if they are dismissed too abruptly and sent from the scene of the action. Groups that lack closure will want to remain so individuals can interact with one another in order to integrate the experience in the psychodrama theatre with the world that they've come from and are going to return to. The time span of the sharing session serves as the interim between the enactment and the return to the non-psychodramatic world waiting outside to be "joined." There is an "incompleteness" apparent if individuals have not had the opportunity for sharing. Sharing provides for catharsis, but it also allows for closure. Content analysis samples would probably reveal that the sharing session has its own warm-up, "acting out," resolution, and integration just as the actual psychodrama session has. The sharing session also takes a classical psychodrama "full circle" in that the psychodrama begins with verbalizing (the interview) moves to action, and then ends with verbalizing (sharing).

The sharing session remains a little understood and little appreciated dimension of the classical psychodrama. The availability of information from social psychology about the nature of group behavior, from speech communication about message variables and outcomes, and from clinical psychology about the effects of self disclosure can contribute to an understanding of the sharing session and a more effective utilization of it.

### SHARING SESSION GUIDELINES

1. The psychodrama is not over when the enactment is over, but when the sharing session is over. The responsibilities of the Director remain intact and operative throughout the sharing session.
2. Sharing ought not to be analytic or evaluative, even of other sharing.

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- Questions and intellectualizing should be discouraged.
3. Sharing should be urged, but not required. The easiest way to bring it about is by (1) clearly establishing the procedure as a norm, and (2) role modeling by providing an example of it oneself. Resistance is generated, even in the most cooperative group members, if there is (1) ambiguity about the procedure, (2) lack of a model, or (3) coercion.
  4. It is necessary that the Director be alert to information divulged in the sharing session being retrieved and seemingly "used against" an individual at a later date. If it becomes the practice of the group to "pick up" on such information to make diagnoses, explain origins, etc., individuals will become more cautious in what they choose to reveal. The nature of the disclosure will have changed from one of "giving of oneself to another" to "exposing oneself for future assessment." Care should be taken to assure that participants in the sharing session will not regret having shared and will not become guarded and cautious in their sharing.
  5. A Director should be alert to socio-emotional aspects of the sharing session and not be misled by content. How something is disclosed and what is evolving while it is being disclosed may be important cues to the development of the group and the needs of group members.
  6. Critique, analysis, or processing of the psychodrama can interfere with optimum use of the sharing session and are more appropriately performed at distinctly separate sessions identified for that purpose.

## SELF DISCLOSURE INVENTORY

1. How would I like to present myself to other people?
2. How do I actually present myself to other people?
3. What about myself do I regard as a handicap?
4. What feelings do I have trouble expressing or controlling?
5. What about myself am I especially proud of?
6. What are my feelings about my appearance?
7. What are my personal standards of attractiveness in others?

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