

Playing Life For Real: Psychodramatic Work with Siblings of the Mentally Ill

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The breakout of a mental illness in the family is a traumatic crisis event. Families, in which one of the members suffers from mental illness, undergo different stages in dealing with that member's disorder.

Psychodrama as a method of group psychotherapy uses dramatic format and theatrical terms. By using psychodrama, human processes can be demonstrated through using spontaneous drama based action.

This current study includes eleven male and female interviewees between the ages of 26-56, who are siblings of mentally ill patients that have been recognized as such by health care and Social Security. Data Analysis brought three main themes to light. All three themes relate to the subjective experience of the interviewees and their individual perceptions. The themes are: 1. 'The Experience of Psychodrama-the Personal and the Universal', which focused on the perception of psychodrama before and after participating in the group. 2. 'The leader in the group: the way in which the psychodramatist is perceived in a psychodrama group.' 3. 'From narrowing the role to its broadening - the changes in the perception of the 'brother/sister of' role, following the group sessions.'

The discussion analyzes the findings along two conceptual axes: 1. 'Liberation from the role - rebuilding the role of 'brother/sister of', exploring new identities and the flexibility in the transition between them'. Participation in the psychodramatic group gave the participants, for the first time, the legitimate feeling of existence as a separate and unique entity with his or her own, personal identity apart from the ill brother or sister. These discoveries are the beginning of an existential process of change in the lives of siblings, in the various relationships in their lives, and within the family unit as well as in other social circles.

2. 'Base of relationships - the relationships among the group members within the psychodramatic experience', which focused on the theoretical analysis of the nature of relationships between members of the psychodrama group and the effect of those relationships on group members. The participants see the existence of a group with common ground as contributing to a freedom that allows them to explore and experience various emotional and conflicting situations in their lives. The psychodrama group was a first experience for all participants and as such, was perceived as allowing them to try 'new things' such as experiencing different responses in familiar situations. Group members were able to provide help and accept it from one another by enacting new voices, expressing different points of view and giving form and voice to internal parts of the psyche, by personifying them and making them available for dialogue and communication.

Keywords: Siblings, Family, Psychodrama, Schizophrenia, Mental Illness, Group Therapy.

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