Monitoring the Psychodrama Process

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ABSTRACT. The authors describe a system for coding the duration of roles enacted in psychodramas. Sessions can be monitored by computer from videotape or in vivo with a minimum of training. Satisfactory interobserver reliability was demonstrated, but observers agreed less about complementary roles of an interaction than they did about protagonist roles. The construct validity of the system was shown by within-session trends of interaction durations involving the director and of durations involving role reversals. The authors also offer data relevant to the disinhibition hypothesis.

THERAPISTS NEED THE ABILITY to measure the process of psychodrama and to assess these processes using a procedure that is objective, has interobserver reliability, and has relevance to psychodramatic theory. The article reports on one such procedure. As a first step, we report on a system for describing roles enacted in psychodrama sessions. Very simply, it has two dimensions: (a) the role enacted by the protagonist, and (b) the role that the protagonist is interacting with, against, etc. The latter will be referred to as the *complementary role*. What is happening at any given moment in the action phase of a psychodrama is clear: the protagonist is being himself or herself and is interacting with someone playing a part or role that has some significance in the protagonist's life, for example, a parent, child, or lover. The duration or percentage of the session that a protagonist spends in or interacts with a specific role would be an important variable, but we could not find any procedure to assess it in the literature.

In the past, some attempts at objective assessment of psychotherapeutic processes were made, but current publications reflect a widening and growing interest (e.g., Butler, 1990) and a number of systems are reported by Greenberg and Pinsoff (1986). A classic procedure for the study of interactions in groups that was developed by Bales (Bales, 1950; Bales & Cohen, 1979) is called the System for the Multiple Level Observation of Groups (SYMLOG). The user of SYMLOG can describe a wide

range of events (e.g., interpersonal acts, values) and varying levels (e.g., verbal–nonverbal, content) along three independent dimensions: dominance–submission, friendliness–unfriendliness, and instrumental–expressive. The system is in wide use and has stimulated a great deal of research (e.g., Polley, Hare, & Stone, 1988).

The study of psychodrama process has resulted in much published material. The typical approach is to record or otherwise summarize some part of a session and present excerpts from the transcript (Corsini, 1966; Kipper, 1986; Moreno, 1964; Starr, 1977). Moreno (1931, cited in Haas, 1948) advocated and reported on the transcription of psychodramas prior to the much-cited work of Rogers, which demonstrated that recording of therapeutic interviews not only preserved the integrity of the process but also made it available for public and scientific investigation (Hall & Lindzey, 1978).

Moreno reported various process analyses (Moreno, 1947, 1964) and published examples of quantitative approaches (1934, pp. 185–193). Haas (1948) developed an early system, in which a transcript of a 15-minute session was presented and analyzed in terms of various dimensions: roles, duration of scenes, reaction time, duration and number of pauses, attitudes, and the total number of words used by each participant. Haas concluded that the expression of attitude varied as a function of the role of the protagonist.

Hare (1976) reported a procedure for dramaturgical analysis of psychodramas; a transcript of an excerpt from a session was presented with appropriate codings, the unit of analysis was the productions of an actor following and preceding the productions of another actor. Each of the 52 events in the published excerpt was evaluated on six dimensions: two involved the actor's role—one, the specific role itself (protagonist, director, auxiliary, audience)—the other, the degree of involvement in that role (scale = 1–5). The other four dimensions referred to the social-emotional behavior of the actor: dominant–submissive, positive–negative, serious–expressive, and conforming–nonconforming. Ratings on each of these dimensions ranged from 1 to 7; by averaging the ratings over the 52 events in the excerpt, the analyst developed summaries for each actor and obtained an overall picture of these aspects of the process. This system was also applied to a transcript of a brief interchange between a demonstrator and a police officer (Hare, 1980).

Boria (1986) reported on an analysis of psychodrama sessions for six protagonists over 3 years during which the protagonists enacted dramas from 13 to 19 times and interacted with 28 to 36 significant others. Parents were by far the most frequent other interactant. Protagonist statements were evaluated on dimensions representing level of definition

of the emotion (negative, positive, diverse). The data were interpreted as showing that specificity of the parental image tended to increase over sessions and that emotions tended to become more diverse and that positive emotions and the development of specificity were associated.

Although the above examples show the need for and the usefulness of systems that evaluate psychodramatic data on meaningful dimensions, none deals with even the most elementary requirement for such measurement, namely, reliability. As desirable as it may be to present data that show the dimensions to have potential meaning and validity, without demonstration of reliability, such presentations are premature. The only system for reporting reliability was described by Clayton (1976), who used it in developing a scale for rating role warm-up in psychodramas. Using a videotape of excerpts from a single session, she found that agreement could be attained with fairly experienced raters. On the basis of the ability of observers to discriminate role states, Clayton identified 12 of 34 items that constituted the final scale.

The challenge in developing procedures that satisfy psychometric criteria is to avoid the assessment of events that are irrelevant. For example, one could assess trivial variables during a psychodrama and attain objectivity and reliability. If the variable measured were body temperature changes during a drama, for example, little might be expected in terms of validity. The construct validity, significance, or meaningfulness of a measure can be determined in various ways, one of which is to assess whether, as theory predicts, it enters into relationships with other variables.

Role is a major construct in psychodrama theory: the hypothesis is that the repertoire available to an individual affects and reflects adjustment, and that a reduction in role availabillity, such as may occur in aging, will produce severe maladjustment (Altman, 1983). A restricted range of available roles limits how an individual can cope with life stresses: sex roles qualify for such restricting effects (male—inhibition of emotion, experience and expression; female—exaggeration of helplessness). Broadening the role-repertoire would be one effect of a successful psychodrama; role training is a specific technique to accomplish this (Hale, 1975).

With the advent of inexpensive video recording, the ability to capture the process of psychotherapeutic sessions becomes readily available. At the same time, however, the information obtained by such procedures can quickly become overwhelming and nearly unmanageable. Another technical development that has made monitoring and coding of events in psychodrama more feasible is the computer, which presents great potential for facilitating tracking processes.

Hill (1986) presented a system for describing verbal responses in psychotherapy. Evidence for validity included data that demonstrated changes in therapists' interventions within sessions: decreases in "minimal encouragement" and increases in "interpretation." In order to assess validity and to demonstrate how specific hypotheses can be tested by the current system, Hill examined change in interaction durations over segments of psychodramas. Durations of interactions between the protagonist and the director and durations in role reversals would be expected to change as the drama progressed. Establishment of contracts (Sachnoff, 1985), setting of scenes, and warming up in the initial stages suggested the possibility of more direction and longer interactions with the director earlier in the sessions rather than later, when spontaneity increases. The opposite should occur for role reversals; that is, durations should increase in later parts as a result of development and elaboration of the drama. (Also, changes would be likely if only due to the ipsative nature of the measurement. In this case, because of the decrease in interactions involving the director, the opportunity for role reversals would increase.) To examine whether the duration of interactions with the director and the role reversals did, indeed, increase, the two factors were examined as a function of the phase of the psychodramas.

Finally, several authors have noted the apparent tendency for some experiences to be more readily attained in certain roles than others (Haas, 1948; Hare, 1976). Kipper (1986) hypothesized that under certain conditions *role reversals* are disinhibiting and permit the experience and expression of acts and emotions that would not otherwise occur. He obtained data relevant to this hypothesis: is a specific emotional act, namely, overt crying, associated with one type of role more than another? The disinhibition hypothesis suggests that the protagonist may manifest more crying in roles other than in the protagonist role.

The purpose of the present research thus is to develop a reliable and practical procedure to assess processes within psychodramas, to assess the construct validity of process measures, and to obtain data that bear on the disinhibition notion. It is hypothesized that: (1) duration of protagonist-director interactions will decrease and durations of role reversals will increase as the psychodrama session progresses; and (2) more frequent and intense crying will occur when the protagonist is in a nonprotagonist role.

Method

Materials and Subjects

Our data was drawn from videotapes of seven psychodrama sessions

involving four female and two male protagonists. Five of the dramas were directed by a highly experienced director, one by a moderately experienced director, and one by an advanced student. All participants in the dramas were mental health professionals. Five of the tapes were from a week-long workshop involving approximately 15 participants who had had a wide range of experience in psychodrama (from a few previous workshops to advanced students enrolled in psychodrama programs). One commercial tape was from a different week-long workshop of approximately 15 substance-abuse counselors (Nolte, 1979). The final videotape was from a self-study group of 6 students who ranged in experience from advanced to naive. In the six dramas from the workshops, professional crews operated the recording equipment and were observable to the group. In the student group, the recording was made by a video camera fixed in an unobtrusive location. All participants in the dramas signed informed consents.

The videotapes were coded by two clinical psychologists familiar with psychodrama principles and practices, three doctoral clinical psychology students, and one advanced undergraduate. Except for the first author (Martin), none of the coders was present during any of the actual sessions.

Design and Procedure

Coders monitored the videotapes, using a laptop computer and entering information that described the specific roles involved in an interaction. At the beginning of a session, for example, the observer described the interaction that was occurring: usually it was between the protagonist and the director. In the case we describe, we simply used the first letter of the person's name or codes like *P* for protagonist, *D* for director. In this interaction, the letters *PD* were typed. The first code entered referred to the role being enacted by the protagonist, the second code to the complementary role. The observer entered new role codes only when the roles changed: if the next interaction involved the protagonist and an auxiliary father, letters such as *PF* would be entered; a role reversal would yield *FP*. The coders entered comments and behavioral observations concurrently. A program stored the information and the time of each entry so that, when the session was finished, a moment-to-moment record of the roles that were enacted and of any other recorded information during the drama was available. Following the session, coders edited the protocols and corrected errors. Programs applied to these corrected protocols summarized the data in various ways, including the total duration, percentage duration, and frequency of a specific event during a session.

The director-protagonist interactions are a special class and some issues are unique to it. Thus, directors prompt frequently: "louder," "reverse roles." These events have been considered interactions only if the protagonist responds to the director's prompting: for example, "I can't." When the protagonist simply carries out the prompt, the director's action does not change the structure of the specific interaction. (Of course, the coder may and does enter these prompts for later analysis.) In practice, this distinction has been quite straightforward.

To obtain interobserver reliability, at least two observers rated six of the seven tapes (the workshop sessions). After being given about an hour of explanation and training, the observers practiced on two sessions with feedback, then independently coded at least two tapes each.

Results

The data in Table 1 are a summary of a complete session. Data reflect total duration in minutes of specific events. Rows refer to each role enacted by the protagonist; columns refer to each complementary role; individual cells refer to the specific combinations of protagonist and complementary roles. The last row of the table contains the total duration that a specific complementary role was involved in the interactions; data in the last column show the total duration of a given protagonist role.

In the drama summarized in Table 1, the action centered on a protagonist who was separating from her son. Significant issues involved

TABLE 1
Durations of Interactions in Minutes: Psychodrama 1

Protagonist role	Complementary role										
	P	D	S	W	C	G	T_1	T_2	0	2	Total
P	—	34.0	11.1	5.8	1.3	0.1	2.1	1.5	6.3	2.1	64.3
S	1.8	7.9	—	—	—	—	—	0.1	—	4.3	14.1
W	0.7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4.2	4.9
T_1	0.7	0.4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.1
T_2	—	2.3	0.7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3.0
2	3.7	6.4	2.6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	12.7
Total	6.9	51.0	14.4	5.8	1.3	0.1	2.1	1.6	6.3	10.6	100.1

Note: P = protagonist; D = director; S = son; W = wife; C = children; G = group; T_1 = therapist 1; T_2 = therapist 2; 0 = soliloquy; 2 = double.

were guilt, anger, and fear, and the drama was 100.1 minutes long. (By this coincidence, the absolute figures are essentially percentages.) The last figure in the first row indicates that 64.3 minutes of the session involved the protagonist as herself; each of the remaining entries in row 1 represents the duration of interactions involving the specific protagonist-complementary role combination. Of the 64.3 minutes the protagonist was herself, 34 minutes consituted interactions between herself and the director; 11.1 minutes involved interactions with her son. As seen in column 1, the protagonist reversed into a total of five different roles; the last column shows the total duration in each of these roles, in this case ranging from approximately 1 minute as a therapist to 14.1 minutes as her son.

We determined intercorrelations between pairs of observers for total duration of each protagonist-complement interaction, percentage of the total session, and frequency of occurrence (see Table 2). All of the coefficients are significant ($p < .001$); most (42 of 50) are in the .90s. Observers also generally agreed in absolute terms: no difference between them for any measure even approached significance.

Although the data of Table 2 show that agreement was high in terms of total duration of the events, they do not show the extent of agreement at any one time. Observers may differ in their determination of the start and conclusion of an event, even though they may agree in their assessment of duration. To what extent did observers agree that a specific event (e.g., a specific role combination) in a psychodrama session was occurring at a given instant? To answer this question, the sessions were divided into seconds, and we determined the agreement of the observers at each second of the drama. We used seconds rather than other intervals because this unit is the most likely to assign equal weight to disagreements and agreements. Although, theoretically, errors should balance out, other units—for example, 5-second intervals—permit more opportunity for biased weighting of a disagreement or agreement, depending on where in the interval it occurred. The second-by-second unit minimizes this problem.

Four of the tapes involving two different combinations of three observers (two clinical psychologists and an advanced clinical psychology graduate student) were assessed second-by-second to determine kappas, a measure corrected for chance agreement (Cohen, 1960; Fleiss & Cohen, 1973). As the data in Table 3 show, all were statistically significant. For specific protagonist-complementary role combinations, kappas ranged from .71 to .79 ($M = .74$). For protagonist roles, with complementary roles ignored, kappas ranged from .75 to .96 ($M = .85$), and for complementary roles, with protagonist roles ignored, the kappas ranged

TABLE 2
Correlations Between Psychodrama Observers

I	II	III	Observers	Tape
	.99	.99	A × B	1
.97	.98	.98	A × B	2
.84	.82	.80	A × C	2
.91	.89	.89	A × E	2
.92	.92	.92	A × F	2
.91	.91	.89	B × C	2
.95	.95	.95	B × E	2
.95	.97	.97	B × F	2
.97	.98	.97	C × E	2
.94	.93	.93	C × F	2
.95	.93	.94	E × F	2
.85	.98	.98	C × D	3
.96	.99	.99	C × E	3
.77	.99	.99	D × E	3
.98	.93	.93	A × D	4
.98	.98	1.00	A × D	5
.99	.99	.99	A × D	6

Measure

I = frequency of interaction
II = duration of interaction
III = percentage of time

Observers

A, B = clinical psychologists
C, D, F = graduate students
E = undergraduate student

Note: All correlations are significant, *ps* < .001.

from .47 to .64 (M = .56). Observers, thus, tended to agree more on the occurrences of the protagonist role than on the complementary aspect of the interaction. Except for the complementary roles, kappas were comparable to those reported by Hill (1986) for coding written transcripts of psychotherapy sessions.

The data in Tables 4 and 5 are summaries of two successive dramas with the same protagonist. The first session lasted 45 minutes, the second approximately 89. For the sake of comparison, the data of Tables 4 and 5 are in percentages; the interested reader can convert to absolute dura-

tions by multiplying each entry by the total time. The first session involved the relationship between the protagonist and his mother, the father having just recently died. The second focused on the loss and grief and in saying good-bye to the father.

In the first of these two dramas (Table 4), the protagonist's roles, combined across all complementary roles, were himself for 64% of the session and his mother 36% of the time. As himself, he interacted with four different complementary roles—brief interactions with the audience (A) and an empty chair (E) 1% of the time, interactions with the director 38% of the time, and with his mother 24% of the time.

In the second drama (Table 5), the protagonist again enacted only one other role beside himself; 72% of the time he was himself, 28% of the time he acted as his deceased father. By examining the last row in Table 5, we can see that the complementary role occupying the greatest percentage of the drama across all protagonist roles involved the father (41%), although total interactions with the director constituted a large amount of the drama (31%).

The last column of each table shows the percentage of total time the protagonist was in each role. It shows that, in all three dramas, protagonists spent over 60% of the drama as themselves. The sessions differed in other characteristics, however: more numerous complementary roles and reversals were involved in the first drama.

To investigate the hypothesis that durations of protagonist-director interactions vary as a function of phase of the session, we divided each of the seven dramas into fourths and determined the percentage of time during each segment that interactions between the protagonist and director occurred. Figure 1 presents the median percentage at each point and

TABLE 3
Kappa Coefficients of Agreement Based on Second-by-Second Analyses

Observer	Tape	Event		
		RC	PR	CR
A × B	1	.79	.88	.64
A × C	2	.76	.96	.53
A × C	3	.72	.75	.58
A × C	4	.71	.82	.47

Note: RC = specific protagonist-complementary role combination; PR = protagonist role, ignoring complementary role; CR = complementary role, ignoring protagonist role. All kappas above are significant, *ps* < .001.

TABLE 4
Percentage of Total Time: Psychodrama 2

Protagonist role	Complementary role					Total
	P	D	M	A	E	
P	—	38	24	01	01	64
M	14	22	—	—	—	36
Total	14	60	24	01	01	100

Note: P = protagonist; D = director; M = mother; A = audience; E = empty chair.

TABLE 5
Percentage of Total Time: Psychodrama 3

Protagonist role	Complementary role							Total
	P	D	F	2	G	M	0	
P	—	24	41	05	01	—	01	72
F	19	07	—	01		01	—	28
Total	19	31	41	06	01	01	01	100

Note: P = protagonist; D = director; F = father; 2 = double; G = friend; M = Mother; 0 = Soliloquy.

shows that, as predicted, the percentage of time decreased over segments. A repeated measurement analysis of variance was conducted on these data and, confirming this interpretation, yielded a highly significant trend, $F(3, 18) = 11.03$, $p = .0002$.

In the same way, we determined the percentage of durations in role reversal over segments for the seven dramas. As the drama unfolded, the duration of role reversals was expected to increase as a function of the development of the story as well as of increasing involvement and spontaneity (see Figure 2). Although the trend increased through the first three segments, it changed in direction from the third to the fourth segment. An analysis of variance of these data yielded a significant effect for segments, $F(3, 18) = 3.16$, $p = .05$. That this trend was curvilinear was indicated by a significant quadratic component, $F(1, 6) = 10.33$, $p = .02$.

Disinhibition

Crying occurred frequently in the sessions, and observation of the role in which it occurred would be relevant to the notion of disinhibition.

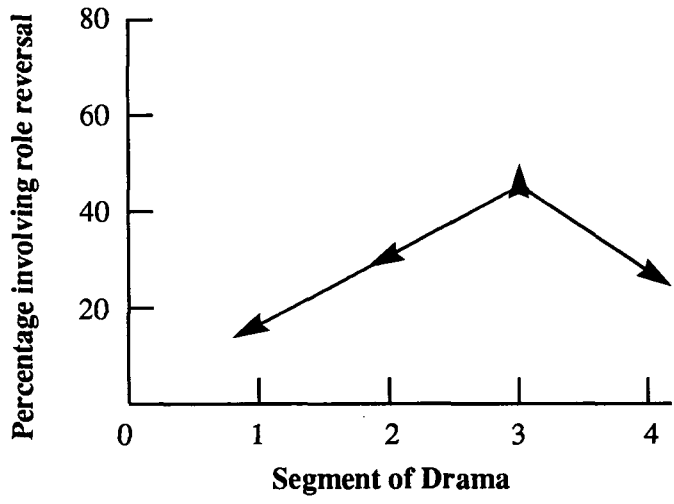

FIGURE 1. Median percentage of duration of interactions involving director in successive psychodrama segments.

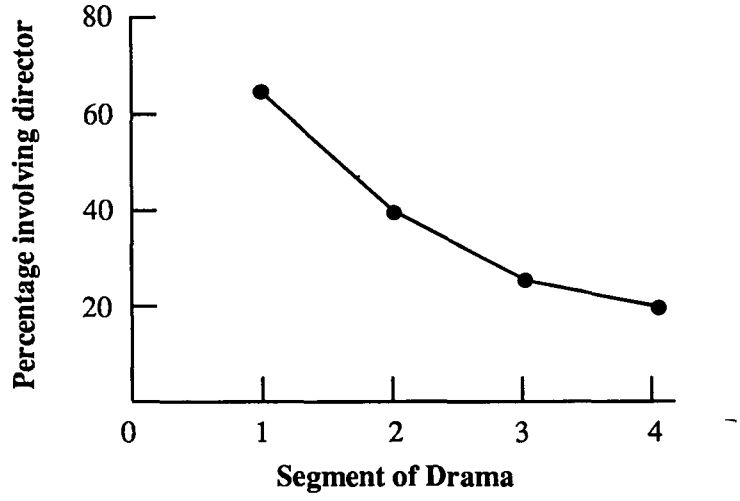

FIGURE 2. Median percentage of duration of role reversals in successive psychodrama segments.

Two apprroaches were taken. In each of the six tapes in which crying occurred, we determined the number of crying episodes and the role being enacted by the protagonist while crying. In two of the tapes, crying episodes occurred *only* in the protagonist role; in the other four, crying occurred both in protagonist and in reversed roles. A ratio of crying episodes to role duration was determined for each type of role by the following formulae:

$$P = (PC/TC)/(PD/TD)$$
$$R = (RC/TC)/(RD/TD)$$

where P = index of relative crying in the protagonist role, PC = number of crying episodes in the protagonist role, TC = total number of crying episodes, PD = total duration of interactions in the protagonist role, TD = total duration of the session, R = index of relative crying in reversed role, RC = number of crying episodes in the reversed role, RD = total duration in reversed roles. Values above 1 indicate more episodes than would be expected, based on opportunity, those of less than 1 indicate fewer episodes than expected (see Table 6). In one session (number 2), the data are in the direction predicted by the disinhibition hypothesis; in two, there is little difference (sessions 1 and 4), and in one (session 3) there is considerably more crying in the protagonist role.

The second approach to this question involved analyses of the roles in which the most *intense* crying episodes occurred. In the dramas presented in Tables 1, 4, and 5, protagonists cried frequently, but episodes varied in intensity. These protocols were inspected and we noted both the intensity of the crying and of the protagonist's role. The scale used involved three intensities: mild tearing-sniffling, tears running down the face, and sobbing. This measure of overt crying has been shown to have satisfactory interjudge reliability (Labott, Martin, & Eason, 1989; Stone & Martin, 1987). In the first drama (Table 1), no relationship between intensity and role existed; in the second and third dramas (Tables 4 and 5), however, a greater number of the more intense crying episodes (tears down face and sobbing) occurred when the protagonist was role reversed than when he was in his own role (7 vs. 5; 3 vs. 2). The sessions in Tables 4 and 5 correspond to sessions 1 and 2 in Table 6; thus, the quantitative cry indices are inconsistent with the above analysis in one case—session 1—but consistent in session 2.

Discussion

All of the sessions that were monitored involved actual dramas. Becaue all of the participants were students and mental health profes-

TABLE 6
Ratios of Crying Episodes in Protagonist and Reversed Roles

Session	Protagonist role	Reversed role
1	1.02	0.97
2	0.62	1.73
3	1.46	0.21
4	1.08	0.85

sionals, however, other populations should be observed. Although it could be argued that limiting effects arise from the videotaping, it seems unlikely that they would be greater than other monitoring procedures. In any case, the reliable coding of ongoing interactions in psychodramas clearly is feasible and does not require highly trained observers. General agreement among both sophisticated and naive observers was high, particularly with respect to the protagonist role. This was probably because this event is quite distinct. For the complementary roles, agreement was considerably less; the basis for this differential obviously requires further study.

With respect to validity, the data indicated that duration of interactions between the protagonist and the director, as well as duration of role reversals, vary as a function of the phase of the drama. The nature of these trends seems consistent with theory, but they clearly require replication. As Boria (1986) indicated, changes in the frequency of occurrence of interactants across dramas is related to other changes. It seems quite likely that durations of enactments, both absolute and relative, represent a more refined measure of these processes.

The data relevant to the disinhibition notion were ambiguous. Using the quantitative index, there was support for the hypothesis in only one session; an analysis of intensity of crying in two protocols, however, yielded results somewhat closer to expectations, that is, a greater frequency of intense crying in reversed roles. It is clear that these data need to be intepreted cautiously. As a first step, it seems necessary to demonstrate that an act or experience was actually in a state of inhibition; observing its disinhibition would then be relevant to the hypothesis. It is noteworthy that in all of the analyses where the data supported the hypothesis, the protagonist was a male: that crying is inhibited in males is suggested from other research (Labott & Martin, 1987).

The disinhibition process should affect other expressive acts. For example, anger and aggression, presumably more likely to be inhibited in

females, would be expected to be susceptible to disinhibition. It is also possible that a critical variable is the role in which the emotional response is initiated. Investigation of this hypothesis and its parameters is sorely needed.

Johnson (1971) and others have reported on the effects of role reversals in analogue research, but little or no research has considered actual dramas (Carlson-Sabelli, 1989). Furthermore, to the authors' knowledge, duration in role reversal, almost certainly an important factor in its effects, has not been assessed in either analogue or actual sessions.

It would be of interest to relate the duration measures obtained in the current system to other variables, including outcome. Although outcome studies are desirable, it may be premature to consider that psychodrama consists of a single method. Schramski and Feldman (1984) recognize this as they describe types and take the training of the director into account. The problem would be how to describe different types of dramas so that comparisons could be made among them. A system such as that presented in this paper offers an objective, quantitative method of describing processes within and between dramas and thus raises the potential that meaningful differences can be isolated. As a result, outcomes can be tied to processes rather than simply to global treatment packages. It would also be of significance to study the relationship of objective duration measures to various subjective reactions by the protagonist following, or even during, the drama.

This approach also opens the possibility for monitoring many other dimensions, including content, overt behavior, and involvement. In addition, it offers the possibility of analysis of sequential processes (e.g., Pinsoff, 1986; Wampold & Kim, 1989). Finally, obviating the need for videotaping, the procedure has been easily and unobtrusively applied in vivo to psychodrama sessions.

NOTES

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Requests for reprints or copies of the program should be sent to Dr. Randall Martin, Department of Psychology, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115.

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