

Section 4: Reviews

Book Review

***Counseling and Drama: Psychodrama a Deux.* By Marvin G. Knittel, EdD. Xlibris, 2009.**

Phoebe Atkinson, LCSWR TEP

In the foreword of this exceptional book, John Nolte reminds the reader of the first rule of psychodrama—“Don’t tell me, show me”—and writes: “Dr. Knittel follows that rule in his presentation of the psychodrama method in this book.” Indeed, the author does this by inviting us into his private practice and walking us through nine very different and moving psychodrama *à deux* sessions. He not only demonstrates a wealth of experience but also shares his passion and respect for the method and its impact in working with individuals and families.

The core of the book examines the question that many clinicians have attempted to answer, namely the use of action methods in individual treatment. Dr. Knittel taught psychodrama classes to graduate students for sixteen years at university and used psychodrama methods with clients in his private practice in Nebraska. His stated objective in writing the book was to add action methods to individual counseling. In this book he addresses a circumstance that many clinicians find themselves in—being trained in a group setting but working in a private practice that mostly consists of working one-on-one with individuals.

The first two chapters of this book cover the origins of psychodrama. Knittel writes from a historical perspective and compares Moreno with other theorists. This book could also have been named “Counseling in the Third Dimension,” as the author explains with clarity the basic concepts when working in the three-dimensional sphere of counseling and how the use of time and space and surplus reality is distinctly different from other forms of treatment. To frame his discussion he quotes a gem from Moreno: “Thus all three dimensions of time, past, present and future are brought together in psychodrama.” He continues, “The idea of psychotherapy of space has been pioneered by psychodrama, which is action-centered and comprehensively tries to integrate all the dimensions of living into itself.” (Moreno 1969) (*Psychiatry of the Twentieth Century: Function of the Universal: Time Space Reality and Cosmos*, Psychodrama Vol. 3, pp. 11–23, Springer, New York.)

The third chapter is a comprehensive review of the literature that is currently available on the topic of psychodrama in individual sessions. The author contrasts

the different views on the uses of psychodrama à deux as evidenced in the various articles. I found of particular interest reading about the diversity of thought regarding the extent to which the therapist becomes directly involved by assuming an auxiliary role or using doubling.

The author says that to take a role of auxiliary is counter to his experience and philosophy. In this discussion he references Moreno's three functions of the director. In this chapter he does identify others who differ with his stand and who in fact do describe playing auxiliary roles and doubling in their individual sessions. Other literature cited sides with Dr. Knittel on the point of maintaining a boundary between client and therapist. This part of the book previews the compelling nine case studies that follow, where the reader witnesses how Dr. Knittel preserves the boundary and maintains his position in the role of director throughout the session while simultaneously being able to use all the tools of psychodrama.

A different aspect of the methodology is highlighted in each of the case studies. Topics covered are the search for meaning, sexual abuse, unfinished business, depression, hanging on and letting go, dependency, family issues, aging, and unresolved guilt. Dr. Knittel taps his and the client's spontaneity and creativity with detailed descriptions of the process as the session progresses. His interventions are unique and he describes the innovative ways he uses himself as a director as he harnesses the full range of psychodramatic methodology.

Dr. Knittel's writing transports one into the sessions as he shares his director's soliloquy. He weaves a thorough knowledge of psychodrama with a clear grasp of theories—to name a few that he mentions: developmental stages, family systems, reality therapy, and trauma. It is clear that Dr. Knittel has great respect for his clients, and he uses the basic tenets of spontaneity/creativity, igniting the autonomous healing agent of the protagonist, and surplus reality to great effect. His style of writing is easy to read and very compelling.

I had a technical question arise that I would have liked to explore when reading about a role reversal of a client into the role of a perpetrator in a sexual-abuse drama. I was curious about this choice, as it differed from some of my training and experience working with this population. Each director makes different choices, and that is the richness of our field and the many choices we make in the role of director. Dr. Knittel illustrates short- and long-term sessions. I think readers will find great interest in the chapters devoted to working with families, where Dr. Knittel shows how he uses role reversal in the warm-up. His bold choice of scene setting and his creativity as director combine to make a very impactful transformation. Another family dealing with role transition is robustly supported by a masterful interweaving of sensitivity to ages and stages and role shifting. Dr. Knittel's use of role training and future projection throughout the sessions are wonderful.

My only criticism of the book is that I would have liked Dr. Knittel to provide more discussion regarding his choice of not taking on auxiliary roles or doubling the client. He does say that it can lead to role confusion; however, as this is something that comes up often in the literature and in training, I would be interested in hearing more of his thinking and philosophy. I infer that it has to do

with (1) strict adherence to Moreno's three functions of the director, cited early in this book (producer, therapist, analyst); (2) not wanting to add any of his own material into the session; and (3) the clinical issue of transference and certain guidelines pertaining to how role taking would impact the therapeutic relationship. Having said that, Dr. Knittel does give many examples of how he gets around taking on roles by prompting different kinds of action and by brilliant use of imagery.

The conclusion chapter at the end of the book affords the author a summary to reflect on the cases that have been presented. He makes a few points regarding the exact features that set action-oriented therapy apart from traditional talk therapy. He does this by identifying a few lessons about doing therapy and the philosophical and methodological understandings that are required to direct psychodrama à deux.

The book also has a full bibliography that connects the current books, articles, and authors referred to, as well as an index for reference.

There has been a need in the literature for more discussion about the application of psychodrama in individual therapy. Knittel states: "My objective is to place another therapeutic method at a counselor's disposal" (p. 96). I think he has done that and so much more. Those who read this book will find that it is an important contribution to the field. It would be an asset to any library for practitioners of individual psychotherapy who are interested in including psychodrama in their work, to students of counseling or those in psychodrama training, and to established practitioners and trainers of psychodrama.