

Auxiliary Ego Functions: Outline, Guidelines and Experiential Exercises

© Copyright 1989, 2005 Rob Pramann, Ph.D., TEP
Shepherd's Staff Training in Psychodrama

This paper is designed to train persons as auxiliary egos for various kinds of psychodramatic enactments. It will outline the functions of the auxiliary ego in general and those of the double in particular. It then will suggest guidelines for serving in each of these roles, describe various kinds of doubling, and provide exercises allowing the participants to practice the roles of the auxiliary ego, the double, and the director. Though there are certainly times when it is valuable to let group members serve in auxiliary roles a trained auxiliary offers a number of advantages. The trained auxiliary is able to warm up quickly to roles, play a variety of roles, easily express feelings, spontaneously play roles requiring childish, "bitchy," cruel, seductive, humiliating, or arrogant behavior, and assist a group auxiliary in warming up to a role by doubling for him/her.

The auxiliary ego is Moreno's term used to identify any person in a psychodramatic enactment outside of the director who assists the protagonist in exploring his/her problem. The Auxiliary may represent figures of many different types. They may represent the role of someone in the protagonist's social atom (husband, friend, employer, or etc.). They may play the role of the double (the protagonist's self or aspect of the protagonist's self). They could portray a more distant general role (a police officer, a member of the clergy, a store clerk), a fantasized figure (God, a judge, the idealized mother), an inanimate object (alcohol bottle, car, doorway), or abstract concept or collective stereotype ("society," "the church," "justice"). The double is given special attention here due to the power of this technique to make clear the nature of the protagonist's dilemma and bring out the latent emotion.

Functions of the Auxiliary Ego

The auxiliary ego serves a number of functions including:

1. To help the protagonist to explore his situation by playing the opposite role (the seducing drug, the infantilizing mother, the demanding job).
2. To evoke in the protagonist a similar (symmetric) response (implying something is a secret or embarrassing by whispering about it, stirring up anger by increasing the volume and pace of speech).
3. To stimulate the protagonist to make a complementary response or to take a complementary role (playing the critical parent to produce the helpless child or the milk—toast husband).

An earlier version of this presentation was made at the Residential Psychodrama Training Seminar at Branham—Donner Ranch San Cristobal, New Mexico, August 4 — 10, 1989. The author may be contacted at Shepherd's Staff Christian Counseling Center, 731 East 8600 South, Sandy, UT 84094, phone (801) 561—9987 or www.sccc.com.

4. To involve the protagonist more deeply in the psychodramatic enactment (the perception that it is happening again now).
5. To bring out basic conflicts and suppressed feelings rapidly and fully (that sense of here I go again!).

Guidelines for Trained Auxiliary Egos

1. Get properly warmed up before the psychodramatic session.
 - a) Immediately before the session be aware of
 - Your own current personal issues that could intrude,
 - Your expectations of the psychodramatic session and what is realistic,
 - The roles you may be expected to play,
 - Your willingness to stand back and to observe or to play, and
 - Your openness to be and learn for your self.
 - b) Actively participate in the group warm up for your own sake and as a model for the group.
2. Move rapidly into any auxiliary role making it here now. Address the protagonist in role as you step on to the stage. If the protagonist continues talking about your auxiliary role respond within the role "Why are you talking like I am not here?"
3. Portray the other person's mood, posture, tone of voice, and other nonverbal behavior. These are often more important than the words. Often times it is helpful to exaggerate these.
4. Play your hunches and take risks.
5. If you are corrected or receive a suggestion from the director or protagonist make a rapid modification.
6. Allow that some roles may be difficult or inappropriate for you to play so that you would need to turn them down (for example, a medication nurse playing the role of a seducing drug or drug pusher on a chemical dependency unit).

Auxiliary Ego / Role Reversal Exercise

1. Form small groups of five maximum composed of persons with varying levels of familiarity/experience with psychodrama.
2. Each individual is to identify someone to whom they would like to talk.

3. Identify the person who will serve as the first protagonist, have them choose who will play the role of the auxiliary ego (the one to whom the protagonist would like to talk), and identify someone to serve in the role of director.
4. The protagonist will begin by talking briefly about the other person to be played by the auxiliary and then begin by the protagonist talking to the other person (the auxiliary ego). When the problem has been briefly stated or the auxiliary is asked a question they can not answer the director should ask the two to change roles with the auxiliary repeating the last couple of statements or the essence of what the protagonist said.
5. When the protagonist has responded as the other person the auxiliary, at the direction of the director, will resume the role of the other person and repeat the essence or last few words that were just portrayed to which the protagonist will be allowed to respond.
6. In this fashion the role will be changed twice more ending with the protagonist saying their last and closing words to the person played by the auxiliary.
7. End this exercise by deroling the auxiliary, sharing (no questions, analysis or advice, but just what the observers learned from the drama for themselves), and processing (talking about the technique, how it was helpful or not, etc).

Double Functions

Doubling has been identified as “the heart of psychodrama” (Blatner, 1996) because it serves to bring out the protagonist’s deepest emotions, one of the major purposes of psychodrama. Thus the double serves additional and unique functions:

1. To stimulate interaction by portraying the protagonist’s experience to its fullest degree.
2. To provide support for the protagonist to enable him to risk and interact more completely (“Doubling before Role Reversal” is a rule of thumb indicating that developmentally a protagonist will be helped by doubling before they are ready to role reverse).
3. To effectively give suggestions and interpretations to the protagonist.

Guidelines for Trained Doubles

Empathizing with 100% accuracy or perfectly playing a double’s role is not possible (nor is it necessarily desirable). However being able to closely approximate the double is important and several obvious cues deserve close attention and serve as jumping off points for drawing inferences.

1. The protagonist’s nonverbal communication: posture, expression, gestures, and tone of voice. As one imitates these characteristics of the double one will likely feel bodily

sensations similar to those of the protagonist. Positioning one's self slightly to the side of the protagonist at a 30 degree angle provides a good vantage point for observation and facilitates identification.

2. The protagonist's use of words. The kinds of words, connotations, and abstractions are vehicles for understanding the protagonist's self system. Paraphrasing what the protagonist is most consciously saying at the beginning provides the basis for understanding and sense of relationship. Later, amplifying, expressing, and dramatizing may be utilized for the other doubling functions.
3. The Protagonist's use of words that are discrepant with his/ her vocal tone.
4. The protagonist's roles and obvious characteristics:
 - a) Physical features,
 - b) Stage in life,
 - c) The challenges, advantages, and disadvantages of present or eminent life roles.

Doubling Exercise

1. Form groups of twos.
2. Identify who will go first.
3. The double will sit slightly behind and at a 30 degree angle to the protagonist carefully observing and imitating the body language, tone of voice, and the concise essence of what the protagonist says taking it a little deeper as the exercise goes on.
4. If the double misconstrues something the double should take it stride and come back along the lines the protagonist has indicated.
5. When the protagonist arrives at a natural stopping point, the double should be deroled, and the two should share and process (discuss) this experience.

Kinds of Doubling

The double can help the protagonist express his/her emotions by emphasizing or amplifying verbal and nonverbal statements made or implied by the protagonist. The following are ways this may take place.

1. Dramatizing the feelings, for example, the protagonist's "I love you" is doubled as "I need you" or "I am irritated with you" becomes "I am furious with you."
2. Verbalizing the nonverbal communication, for example, tightness in the throat could be verbalized as "you are choking me."

3. Physicalizing words and gestures, for example, sitting or kneeling on the floor before another auxiliary.
4. Support, verbal, for example, "I don't need to give you an answer" or nonverbally, for example, extending one's hand and applying light pressure to the back of the protagonist, or walking arm in arm with him/her.
5. Questioning the self, for example, "Is this what I really feel?"
6. Contradicting the feelings (for the purpose of gaining a stronger affirmation of the protagonist's feeling or if opposite or concurrent contradictory feelings are suspected). For example, "I don't want anything to do with you but your approval is important."
7. Defending against the feelings (the double verbalizes the protagonist's defense), for example, "I would never be angry with you like you are with me" or "If I was not depressed I would probably be angry with you."
8. Self observation, for example, "There I go intellectualizing when the emotions become intense" or "I'm acting as if he was out to hurt me."
9. Interpretation (care must be exercised to not introduce something outside of the protagonist's awareness). "I will not respond to his criticism because he is always right." "This is just the way my father treated me."
10. Interpretation of carry-over to other relationships (a sort of reverse transference in which the protagonist is not only responding to an auxiliary in role but in terms of some other aspect of the person's real identity). "Not only am I afraid of you as my father, I'm afraid of most authority figures."
11. Satire, for example, "It hurts so well." (To be used with sensitivity and caution.)
12. Divided double (usually the director assigns the double to play an explicit part. This helps the protagonist to clarify the complimentary part) "I could never do that, I feel so helpless." "It couldn't ever be my fault."
13. Multiple doubles (multiple persons play the role of the double to help clarify the protagonist's feelings).
14. The group or collective double (similar to the above but the audience is allowed to state their doubling statements from the floor).
15. The auxiliary's double (doubling for someone other than the protagonist. Note: some certified practitioners believe that only the protagonist should have a double).
16. Soliloquy (the protagonist can have a double even though there is no verbal interaction), for example, the double can serve as the self to whom the protagonist talks in a soliloquy.
17. Doubling for the audience (to give expression to the audience's feelings toward the drama or any of the participants including the director), for example, "this is boring" when the drama is lagging due to excessive intellectualization.

18. Doubling in the warm-up (doubling for a potential protagonist to move him toward action on stage), for example, "I really wanted to do a drama but I feel ashamed, no one would want to spend time on me."

Reference

Blatner, A. (1996). *Acting in: Practical applications of psychodramatic methods, 3rd Ed.* New York: Springer.