

Drama Therapy for Adolescent: Exploration of the Creation of Psychological Drama

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Abstract: Adolescents, as a group receiving significant social attention, have their mental health closely monitored. Various solutions and healing methods have been explored for the mental health issues they face. Drama therapy, as an emerging psychological healing method, has gradually become well-known through experimentation and promotion, evolving into a new and emerging form of psychological therapy with notable achievements in known healing cases. However, due to the relatively recent emergence of drama therapy, there is not yet a complete system for its creation. Therefore, this paper primarily explores the methods and elements of creating psychological drama in adolescent drama therapy.

Keywords: Adolescents; Mental health; Psychological drama; Drama therapy; Drama creation

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1. Origin of Psychological Drama

Psychological drama was created by the Austrian psychiatrist Moreno. The precursor to psychological drama was the "Spontaneous Theater" established by Moreno in Vienna, the capital of Austria in 1921. As a new model of group psychological counseling and therapy, psychological drama differs from traditional forms of therapy that primarily rely on conversation. Instead, it helps individuals express their feelings of real or imagined events that cause psychological conflicts by engaging in social role-playing. This process aims to reduce habitual psychological defenses, awaken their latent psychological regulatory abilities, and achieve the goal of psychological therapy^[1].

Psychological drama was introduced to China in the 1990s, giving rise to campus psychological drama. Campus psychological drama draws mainly from student life, setting scenes in environments such as campuses, dormitories, and families where students frequently engage. Guided by professional theoretical principles and expressive techniques, participants use self-written and self-performed artistic forms to showcase the challenges and issues they face in real life. Through interaction and support between viewers and performers, they experience subtle psychological changes, uncover and express their true selves, leading to psychological healing and growth. Viewers can simultaneously enjoy "appreciation and therapeutic effects" during the pleasant viewing process, making it a psychological therapy process for them as well^[2].

2. Current Status of Adolescent Mental Health

Adolescence is a critical period for physical and mental development, shaping one's worldview, values, and beliefs. It is also a time of academic, familial, and social pressures and confusion. During this stage, adolescents' mental health can be significantly impacted, leading to various psychological problems or distress in areas such as learning, life, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships.

According to a 2021 survey on mental health by Renmin University of China, the detection rates for anxiety among primary, middle, high school, and college students in China were 12.3%, 27.0%, 26.3%, and 13.7%, respectively. The detection rates for sleep

disorders were as high as 25.2%, 17.0%, 23.0%, and 23.5% in the same groups^[3]. The study also highlighted the inadequacy of mental health education and campus services in central and western regions and economically underdeveloped areas, exacerbating students' mental health issues. Moreover, there is a widespread misunderstanding of mental health in society, with inadequate understanding of the harms caused by mental health issues. When adolescents face psychological problems, they lack proper guidance and may be dismissed as exaggerating or causing trouble, leading many to avoid seeking medical help and worsening their conditions^[4].

Adolescents are the future of the country and the hope of the nation. They not only need material incentives but also require emotional care. Mental health is essential for sustained personal development, and a positive psychological state is beneficial for adolescents to cultivate their personal qualities and achieve their life ideals.

3. The Necessity of Adolescent Drama Therapy

In the field of psychology, therapeutic methods include supportive psychotherapy, directive psychotherapy, cognitive therapy, interpersonal psychotherapy, and music therapy. The characteristics and advantages of drama therapy lie in incorporating various psychological healing methods, providing relaxation and guidance to adolescents in distress from multiple sensory and cognitive perspectives. It is an integrated and promising therapeutic approach. Therefore, it is necessary to develop drama therapy with psychological drama as its main content.

4. Exploration in the Creation of Psychological Drama

This study explores the creation of psychological drama based on the second prize-winning play "Judgment on the Rooftop" from the 6th National Excellent Psychological Situational Drama Performance, aiming to glimpse into the core elements of psychological drama creation through individual expressions and summarize some common creative methods. Personal creative styles that appear strongly are not considered as common creative methods and thus are not discussed. The followings are the main research contents:

4.1 Themes of Psychological Drama

The themes of psychological drama are often related to its purpose. In adolescent psychological dramas, common themes include issues such as relationships between children and parents, interpersonal relationships, campus violence, academic difficulties, life choices, and dream challenges. These themes point to different psychological dilemmas, representing various causes of psychological problems during adolescence. To unravel these dilemmas, psychological drama aims to alleviate or even resolve these issues, leading to a variety of themes.

The choice of themes determines whether a psychological drama can delve deeply into the inner world of adolescents and truly have a healing effect. The theme of the psychological drama "Judgment on the Rooftop" revolves around labels, flaws, and self. The story begins with accusations of being too thin, too fat, irritable, clever, and lazy. Under these labels, they come to the rooftop to face judgment. On the judgment stage, they accuse each other, engaging in a confrontation. Ultimately, the clever one receives a death sentence. However, the judgment is not meant to stifle them; the judge gently guides them to recall the good times. It turns out that life should not be constrained by labels. The judgment on the rooftop is, in fact, a redemption of the soul. As the bells ring for a new day, all five individuals bravely remove their labels, attempting to perceive the beauty of life with their hearts and ultimately embracing the poetic romance of life, heading towards the lush greenery of life.

In today's fast-paced life, labels are something everyone struggles to escape. These labels can be positive or negative, but in any case, they can trap individuals' diverse development, acting as a constraint. "Judgment on the Rooftop" uses this widespread and profound social issue as the basis for its creation, integrating the confusion of adolescents' self-awareness, employing a multi-perspective form of expression, creating a psychological drama that strikes at the heart of the audience. Its theme is closely related to life, keeping the audience engaged, and engaging in a multi-dimensional exploration of the soul within a familiar language system.

Therefore, the theme of a psychological drama should not be empty; it should not only preach or theorize but lack specific events as support. When directors fully experience and perceive the dilemmas faced by adolescents in real life, gain inspiration for the script's content, and then choose a theme based on this inspiration rather than rely solely on imagination to write a psychological drama from a didactic perspective, the foundation of the psychological drama and its healing effects truly come into existence.

4.2 Expressive Techniques in Psychological Drama

Expressive arts therapy originated from art therapy and had a history of more than 40 years. It involves using and integrating different art forms in psychological therapy to help visitors express inner emotions, improve self-personality, and provide counseling and treatment methods^[5]. Drama therapy is also a part of expressive arts therapy, with the expression methods of psychological drama being one of the main research directions. On the drama stage, physical activity is the most important form of expression, as it can both release self-energy and serve as a link for energy exchange between individuals and objects.

In the psychological drama “Judgment on the Rooftop”, there is a scene of expressive physical activity. Through tense music, flickering stage lights, and the actors’ intense performance mode, it portrays a hidden confrontation among the participants in the judgment. Whether it’s the struggle over props or the pace going from slow to fast, it all showcases a tense atmosphere of confrontation, illustrating an instance where the psychological atmosphere is expressed through physical movements.

Like the importance of physical movements in dance or mime, a psychological drama cannot solely rely on dialogue and plot. At the right moment, adding appropriate physical displays to showcase the inner world of pain or joy allows the audience and participants to intuitively feel the psychological conflicts of the scene. This is a significant difference between psychological drama and conventional plays, and it is a characteristic that showcases the therapeutic function of psychological drama.

4.3 Abstraction and Psychology

Abstraction is a major characteristic of psychological drama. In the stage expression of psychological drama, we often see expressions such as: empty chairs, role-playing, doubles, mirrors, magical shops, surreal fairy tale performances. These are the greatest manifestations of abstraction in psychological drama, where a chair on stage could possibly represent the phantom of a character. In abstract forms of expression, psychological emotions gradually become concrete and tangible, turning into something visible and touchable. Just like in “Inside Out”, where both good memories and bad memories are condensed into a crystal ball---a bright, clear crystal ball symbolizing good memories, while a dark, dull one represents bad memories that are destined to be forgotten. Expression is abstract, while manifestation is concrete. Abstract emotions or feelings are concretized into actions, dances, or objects, which can better engage participants and audiences in the plot, flowing along with the emotional dynamics of the drama.

In the psychological drama “Judgment on the Rooftop”, there is a scene where the judge hands a willow branch to the cunning one. The willow branch in this context is an abstract representation. In real life, a willow branch as an object does not serve the purpose of prompting or helping people to transform internally. However, in psychological drama, the willow branch serves as a symbolic object that can embody purification, awakening, and more. It can represent an olive branch symbolizing peace, or a book filled with solutions. In essence, its abstract role transcends the functionality it physically carries.

Abstraction and psychology are inseparable. Participants in drama therapy and audiences can repeatedly attempt to touch their true psychological selves through abstract expressions. When they touch upon something that truly represents themselves, the function of psychological healing --- finding and accepting oneself --- becomes easier to manifest.

5. Conclusions

Overall, adolescent drama therapy is still in a continuous process of development. As a medium that allows adolescents to change their perspectives on their life challenges, psychological drama undoubtedly requires more theoretical research and support. The quantity and quality of psychological drama creations, as well as the therapeutic functions they carry, still require ongoing exploration at deeper levels.

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