

Digging for gold: the search for meaning

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'What are you focusing on in your research?' Max asked with clear interest.

'Defining the psychodramatic concept of warm-up, Max,' I said.

I could see that Max was becoming mildly congested as his eyes reddened and his nostrils flared, presumably from the strengths of his responses ranging from 'I've already written about that extensively', to 'Haven't you listened to anything I've ever said?' Not waiting for the congestion or dyspepsia to pass, whichever it might have actually been, I hurried on to head him off at the pass.

'I know you've written about warm-up extensively in your co-authored book and in other works and chapters. You've written about how to recognise it, how to work with it, and where to expect it. And you've also taught extensively on how to notice and recognise it, and then work with it psychodramatically.'

As I spoke, Max seemed to settle, so I continued...

'However, while you've been a champion of noticing and working with warm-up, it is nowhere effectively defined in such a manner as to make it possible for me to do something approaching research on it.'

And I took breath.

'And without such a recognisable definition I'm tasked with either defining it or doing something else entirely. And I don't mean that it isn't well defined, I mean it's about as undefined in any meaningful sense as any term has ever been undefined.' I went on.

'In our training we exclusively teach warm-up through oral teaching methods, observation of other's directing and their group work. We do this again and again, and over time we develop consciousness of our own warm-up in different situations, such as when leading or directing, and other equally highly effective and experiential teaching processes. However, we define it though demonstration and not through written language.'

And finally, I added:

'And because you've convinced me that warm-up is one of the most useful and important psychodramatic terms available, I want to render

it able to be empirically researched by defining it clearly in mostly everyday language and I want to do that as well as I can.'

Max smiled and nodded and from his warm-up I interpreted that he was searching through his own memory for examples where he or others might have actually defined or nearly defined the term, 'warm-up'.

The term *warm-up* came to my attention when I couldn't find a useful definition anywhere – at least not ones I could confidently give to highly educated and articulate trainees. I searched Max's works and found endless references to warm-up. I searched Moreno's works and found some. Then I searched the regular data bases and found little that was of use. If you try searching for warm-up on Google Scholar for instance, you become inundated with articles about sport, music, and exercise, going back many decades followed by more recent articles on ... you guessed it: climate change. It's a mare's nest!

This led me on a merry trail of trying to define warm-up as it was used in Moreno's texts and then I compared that with the texts of '*those who should know*'. I wrote the finding of this exploration in an article entitled, *The transmogrification of warm-up: from drama to psychodrama* (Howie & Bagnall, 2015). I found four distinct uses of it in Moreno's writing and this was challenging because each usage of warm-up was only clear from the context, and the wording in each occurrence was identical or equally woolly. Warm-up was used as a process and also as a way to recognise the state of a person or a group. For instance, a sentence like this makes complete sense to many psychodramatists: 'As the director began a warm-up process with the group, what was the group's initial warm-up, and how did director then assist the protagonist to warm-up in their role and what was their warm-up?'. But unless a person has undertaken many hours of training and practice this sentence might not read like warm-up as something discrete and distinguishable, let alone clear, or concise – all of which are necessary conditions to engage with for meaningful empirical research. And, by empirical research, I mean here research that is publishable in peer-reviewed or other equally worthy journals, and is interesting, insightful, explorative; that opens up novel avenues of thinking, and contributes to the canon of human understanding; and, most importantly, would allow other non-psychodramatist folks to understand and make use of these original ideas in their own canons of understanding and specialisation without turning psychodramatic ideas into something they are not.

Most psychodrama practitioners and trainees will recognise the following four uses of the term *warm-up* but they may not recognise the

extra words I have added before and after the term in order to differentiate each of these uses (Howie & Bagnall, 2015). The four definitions are listed below in italics, with some addition to my earlier peer reviewed text in non-italicised text:

1. *The group warm-up process: Warm-up as a process applied to groups of people to generate a certain level of energy or spontaneity that would enable them to engage collaboratively with the group leader and with one another.* The process identified as: doing a warm-up, warming-up the group. We've all used the term, or one very like it, a zillion times.
2. *The group warm-up state: Warm-up as a heuristic for determining or measuring the preparedness, or the level of spontaneity, of a group. A 'heuristic' is a rule of thumb or a quick way to work something out that is good enough for the moment. Again we've all asked ourselves, 'What is the warm-up of the group?' Or we have written about the warm-up of a group for a thesis, examination, or another article. We might have asked someone, 'What was the group warmed-up to?'*
3. *The individual warm-up process: Warm-up as a process applied to an individual to prepare them, or by an individual to prepare themselves, in some specific manner, or as a response to a context.* When considered for more than a minute this definition is both simple and comprehensive. It includes, as it is written, the whole of the psychodrama cannon of concretisation, mirroring, modeling, role reversal, soliloquy, maximization, doubling, and the endless variations we have all produced. This is because these are all psychodramatic processes that are used to warm-up a protagonist.
4. *The individual warm-up state: Warm-up as a heuristic for determining or measuring an individual's total state of functioning, or state of being, at a moment in time, in a context.* This refers to those endless number of moments in any psychodramatic enactment, when we look at the protagonist and assess their warm-up in the moment to the context we have co-created on the stage or in the group.

Of these four definitions, the one of most interest to me was the final one: *the individual warm-up state*, because this is the one most used here in Australia and in Aotearoa New Zealand. We have taught and been taught to notice the individual warm-up state of the protagonist, and in our group members more generally. Staying in-tune with the group members through noticing their individual warm-up state is very common and has been written about extensively in Max and Phil's book, *The Living Spirit of the Psychodramatic Method*, and in other publications (Carter 2011, Carter & Clayton 2004).

This investigation then led me on a merry chase that required me not only to develop a definition of a *warm-up concept* that was now named differently from one that most practitioners would recognise, but also required me to develop a concept about what an adequately defined concept might actually look like. So I plunged down the rabbit hole of language, philosophy, and meaning, in order to determine what makes an adequate concept. This new approach of playing with the conceptions of concepts such as: the psychology of concepts, the function of concepts, the concept of concepts, and similar arcane learning, was quite a long way from the pragmatic, action-oriented world of psychodrama that I so loved and recognised.

However, I did have the foresight to recognise that not only is warm-up inadequately defined, I recognised and considered that many other of our lovingly held and clearly understood terms might also not to be adequately defined. And this does, indeed, appear to be the case with a wide variety of psychological constructs and terminologies. The next step was for me to develop a complete methodology for reconceptualising concepts, and to do this in a robust and sense-making manner, instead of what usually happens: a concept in use is defined only for the purpose of the article or research where it is used, even though such a definition might not fit anything anyone else has written or researched.

As I continued to plunge down the rabbit hole of definitions and concepts I realised that I might need to find a reasonable argument for why any concept is, or is not, adequately defined. I had initially done this with warm-up by pointing to inconsistencies in some of the 'definitions' that were being used. But now I really needed to think through, with some grunt, why warm-up needed reconceptualising, or defining well, and just what would the qualities of such a good definition be. Because at the end of the day I would need to say why what I had written was better than what had been written before me. This would require some generalised principles or criteria for what an adequate concept might look like.

This took nearly a year. I researched extensively what others thought such criteria should be and was shocked to find that there were almost none. Most of the stuff I found was about 'methodology' which was about making up new ideas not refining existing ones. This required that I take the plunge into the deep end of obscure language lore. So I said to myself 'Hello Philosophy-of-Language-Out-of-His-Depth-Peter' and 'Good-bye for now to Action-Oriented-Comfort-Zone-Peter.'

Through many trials and tribulations and the fine parsing of language I eventually ended up developing the following criteria for defining an adequate concept:

1. *Clarity* - identifies the extent to which a concept is coherent, intelligible, comprehensible, and lacking ambiguity.
2. *Comprehensiveness* - identifies the extent to which a concept is sufficient for the task at hand.
3. *Parsimony* - identifies the extent to which a concept is focused on the task at hand, and no further.
4. *Resonance* - the ability of the written or spoken articulation or name of a concept to be catchy, memorable, alliterative, consonant, and appealing in and of itself, rendering a concept attractive, readily remembered and recalled, engendering an interested or pleasing response, and creating or serving as a lyrically or poetically unified description.
5. *Differentiation* - the degree to which a concept is distinguishable from other concepts relevant to the task at hand.
6. *Connectedness* - the extent to which a concept is linked substantively with other concepts important in the context of its use.
7. *Epistemic utility* - the extent to which a concept is descriptively, explanatorily, and predictively useful in the context, which really means the capacity for the concept to promote new research or give new meaning to an existing idea.
8. *Practical utility* - identifies the extent to which a concept is useful in informing what persons actually do—their actions—in the context of interest.

Phew – what a mouthful! But this is a fascinating and instructive read if you are interested in the subject (Howie & Bagnall 2018).

And with these criterial concepts I was able to work out, in a fairly formal manner, that warm-up was inadequately defined because descriptions of warm-up have:

- **Low** clarity because it has unclear and ambiguous definitions;
- **Low** comprehensiveness because the definitions that exist are not many and inadequate as I discovered in my 2015 paper mentioned earlier (Howie & Bagnall 2015);
- **Low** parsimony because there are so many extra terms added into any description of warm-up as to render the definitions impossible to really understand;

- **Strong** resonance and this is shown by the term having infiltrated its way into practically everywhere in psychodrama;
- **Low** differentiation because of low clarity, comprehensiveness, and parsimony, making it impossible to differentiate warm-up from, say, readiness;
- **High** connectedness with many psychodramatic concepts – however, these connections themselves are **weak** because not only is warm-up ill-defined but so are many of the related concepts;
- **Low** epistemic utility, largely due to its low clarity and differentiation and the weakness of its connectedness, making serious research highly problematical;
- **Strong** practical utility as evidenced by the concept’s utilisation in psychodrama practice and training and its extensive use in psychodrama literature (Howie & Bagnall 2018).

Resonance and practical utility are qualities that enabled the warm-up concept to thrive: warm-up is what it says it is and it is easy to use. Resonance, on its own, carries a lot of concepts into prominent use, for example: the term ‘quantum’, when applied to just about anything becomes wonderfully sciency. If you don’t believe me, then please imagine ‘quantum psychodrama’. Even though these two criteria explain why the term has become popular, they alone do not indicate an adequately defined concept.

I began the task of defining or redefining or reconceptualising by rewriting the 2-line individual warm-up state definition *Warm-up as a heuristic for determining or measuring an individual’s total state of functioning, or state of being, at a moment in time, in a context* into a more comprehensive definition. This was a beautiful process as I had to argue, for instance: exactly what a ‘heuristic’ might be, what ‘determining’ something meant, and what ‘measuring’ something means, and other such fun language and logic manoeuvres. But in the end, I formulated a workable short and long definition for the concept of individual warm-up state.

I then became savvy with internet questionnaires and selected and invited 374 psychodrama practitioners to participate: 111 in Australia or Aotearoa New Zealand, 141 in the USA or Asia, and 122 in Europe – all chosen because I knew them, or I knew of them through their writing. I also included some video clips I had made which showed the warm-up concept clearly. Two videos were from commercial movies, *The Kings Speech* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, and three I had myself created with volunteer participants. I showed them the definitions I had written and my reasons for doing so. I asked the practitioners to rate the

definition provided, say why they had done so, what they liked most and least, and what other comments they might have.

This produced a wondrous flurry of responses to the tune of around 30,000 words of beautiful and qualitative data that I needed to order and work with. Firstly I worked out whether or not folks thought it was worth the pixels it was printed on. And it turned out that seventy-four practitioners largely accepted the concept and two largely rejected it, while many both accepted elements and rejected others. You'll see in the definition that follows, there is plenty to accept or reject. Then I needed to find something to do with the critically useful comments – the ones that pointed out my errors of logic, thinking, grasp of the idea, or similar. Then I cunningly used the brilliant set of criteria I had developed to filter all those comments in order to bundle them into discrete categories (Howie & Bagnall 2018). Thus, comments about clarity were bundled with the criteria on clarity, such as, *'I think that these encapsulate the basic components of warmup and makes a clear statement especially for a person who is not trained in the psychodramatic methods. (Wallace, S.)'*. Comments on comprehensiveness were similarly bundled with the criteria on comprehensiveness, and so on. This proved to be quite a boon as many of the comments focused on different elements and I needed to make a real go of using the generously given though often succinct and sometimes cryptic responses.

Once I had extracted critically useful comments and then bundled these together, I set about reviewing these and making arguments about why I should or shouldn't adjust the definition I had created. And now I present some of that definition below. I've left bits of the definition out, which were only included for people who did not know of the concept. And I've modified slightly the language.

Warm-up the phenomenon: Warm-up is a psychodramatic concept proposing that an individual's total functioning state in the moment is readable. The reading of the warm-up may be done with some accuracy by a trained professional and be utilised while working with the individual in a variety of ways. It is conceived that the state they are in is a direct and intimate response to their context, which is the totality of interdependent coexisting factors. Thus each person has their own individual warm-up state in response to their situation from moment to moment. Such a state may be transitory or persist for a lengthier period of time. In general it is likely that a person is self-consciously aware of only some elements of their individual warm-up state and less aware or unaware of other elements, though they may become more aware. Any individual warm-up state changes as differing group and individual

warm-up processes are brought to bear, in much the same way as water changes its state from solid ice to liquid water to vaporous steam through the application of heat.

Warm-up is used in a psychodramatic enactment as a heuristic, or rule of thumb, for judging an individual's total state of functioning, their state of being at a moment in time, in the entirety of their context. It includes their range of responses, such as their conscious, unconscious, non-conscious, pre-conscious, cognitive, conative, affective, and action responses. It is assumed that this warm-up has a concomitant effect on a person's subsequent cognitions, conations, affect, and actions. For instance, if a person warms-up to being judged critically then it is likely they will experience critical judgement as coming from those around them and themselves, as a consequence of their warm-up.

Warm-up is relevant in a psychodramatic enactment because the psychodrama director is producing moments of action and interaction between the person they are working with, the protagonist, and other people, and objects on the stage. When such actions and interactions are being produced in the moment and live on stage, the director is required to have an ability to immediately grasp the warm-up of the protagonist, not just their response in language, or their non-verbal responses, which provide an indication of the protagonist's readiness, or lack of readiness, as well as other states of preparation for certain areas of dramatic work.

Without this ability of the director, the psychodramatic enactment may have little therapeutic or creative impact. With this ability, the director is able to give immediate production directions that increase the spontaneity, and the capacity of the protagonist to creatively generate new solutions to old problems. This definition of the individual warm-up state was designed solely to clarify it as a stand-alone concept without reliance on other overlapping or connected psychodrama or group therapy concepts, psychodrama production methods, or other forms of application.

Warm-up may be read: Warm-up may be read through an inferential process based on perceiving a variety of responses exhibited by a person. This list is illustrative rather than exhaustive and includes: (1) the speech and types of language a person exhibits; (2) language content; (3) paralinguistic factors (factors other than language), such as timing, tonal modulation, sound quality, pitch, pace, rhythm, loudness, intensity, resonance, accent and inflection, vocal and delivery styles, etc.; (4) attendant non-verbal cues, such as placement of attention through body positioning, head positioning, gaze direction, and the timing of these factors; (5) body tonus and movements, such as jerky, fluid, rhythmical,

tense, speedy, or slow movements, and the overall rhythmicity of bodily movements; (6) posture, such as sitting, standing, slouching, and movements between postures; (7) gestures, including hand, facial and limb gestures, and their interplay; (8) other physiological factors, such as changes to pupil size, skin colour, and skin colour changes; (9) a person's use of space between themselves and others and the objects around them; (10) the objects with which a person is surrounded or where their warm-up is occurring, including such factors as place, lighting, and surroundings; (11) a person's presentation, including such things as clothing colour and style, accoutrements, such as jewellery or wallets, watches, or bags, their hair colour and style, and; (12) the relationships and timing between all these factors. The warm-up heuristic, while clearly an approximation through the inferential process, allows for the development of a holistic hypothetical representation of a person. For instance, a person seen to slump their shoulders, drop their head, turn away slightly, cast their eyes down, speak in a quiet voice, breath shallowly, or have minimal eye contact may be considered, as an initial hypothesis by the director, to be warming-up to being judged.

Learning to read warm-up accurately: Learning to read warm-up accurately requires a professional to consciously infer another person's warm-up and this capacity is developed through extensive training in noticing and imaginatively inferentially making use of the factors mentioned in a wide variety of situations. Additionally, the capacity for accuracy and immediacy in their ability for judging another's warm-up, is enhanced by the higher the degree of diversity of a person's lived experience and their personal knowledge of impinging cultural and contextual factors on the individuals they work with. This occurs as a result of broader life experience allowing a greater variety of plausible inferences to be developed from the same observed data.

The inference of another person's warm-up is a holistic response, which, for idiosyncratic reasons to do with the director's own life experience and training, may rely on only some factors (for instance, speech delivery, vocal tone, and volume) rather than others (for instance, posturing and gesturing, and language content). It is, nevertheless, complete in the sense that such an inference produces a hypothetical judgement which is a complete picture of the person's response to their context in the moment. The emphasis is given for 'in the moment' because the hypothesis of a person's warm-up may change from moment to moment: as new factors are noticed by the person making the inference, or as the hypotheses does not stand up to scrutiny from enquiry of the person, or as the context becomes modified through

actions of the person. For instance, a person (as described above) with slumped shoulders and head, with downcast eyes, speaking in a quiet voice, and having minimal eye contact, may be initially be seen as having a warm-up to being judged critically, but in the next moment may bring their head up, their shoulders back, and may glare around them; and this may be seen as a warm-up to active defiance or self-preservation.

Afterwards

And what could I write about now with regards warm-up? I could consider our colloquial use of the term *warm-up*, where it is sometimes described almost as though it were a type of energy or force acting on a person and consider how I might address this as a fifth use of the term. This would be one of those situations where the director might ask:

‘What is the protagonist’s warm-up?’

The question may actually mean something more like:

‘What is the overall intention, conscious and nonconscious purposefulness, liveliness and life force that is emanating and acting through their face, eyes, body, psyche, and presentation in this context, which I can see in their current individual warm-up state?’

Or, another person, smarter than I, of which there are plenty, might cunningly suggest:

‘What role are they warming up to?’

And thus we are back with needing to define the term ‘role’ which some folks suggested I had defined instead of warm-up, and about which we had a most lively, ongoing, and probably never-ending discussion. But nothing is solved by defining things in this manner. I have found numerous times that whenever a term is defined by another ill-defined one, there remains a need to define the introduced term as well. This is a bit like trying to define ‘spirit’ by using the term ‘soul’ which leaves us no better off. Or ‘happiness’ by using the term ‘bliss’ – still no better off; or ‘purpose’ by using the term ‘intention’, and on and on it goes. There are subtleties and nuances that are required to be considered and there are rabbit holes to avoid as well as to explore.

One thing that the methodology I developed requires is that the initial step, and the most important one, is for someone to take the time to work through the various implied and sometimes well-articulated definitions of some of our terms. This would involve some real nutting out of meanings from the point of view of language use rather than pragmatics, or use, or convenience. It is this work that takes the time and also where the gold lies. Psychodramatists use many terms that deserve better definitions, for instance: spontaneity, creativity, tele, concretisation, social

and cultural atom, role reversal, role, mirror, and stages of development. I encourage you to take the criteria I developed and use them to evaluate your favourite terms or concepts and see which ones need a clean-up or reconceptualisation and where. These rich and vibrant terms deserve to emerge from the semi-obscurity of oral and experiential traditions so that they can be available to the wider world of social investigation and research. I invite you to join me in this endeavour and see what gold we might find.

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