

MONODRAMA

Authored by
mohammad looti

October 26, 2025

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2025). *MONODRAMA*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=61364>

MONODRAMA

Primary Disciplinary Field(s): Psychotherapy, Group Therapy, Drama Therapy

1. Core Definition and Context

Monodrama is a specialized psychotherapeutic technique rooted in the larger domain of action methods, most notably Psychodrama, pioneered by Jacob L. Moreno. At its core, monodrama involves a single individual, often referred to as the **protagonist**, acting out an emotionally significant scene, conflict, or internal dilemma while situated within a supportive group environment. Unlike traditional group psychodrama, where the protagonist interacts with other group members who take on auxiliary roles, in pure monodrama, the entire dramatic action unfolds solely through the protagonist's performance. This individual takes on all necessary roles--themselves, significant others, objects, or even abstract concepts--using techniques like soliloquy, role reversal with imaginary figures, and doubling, allowing for intense focus on the singular, subjective experience of the individual.

The central purpose of monodrama is to facilitate deep emotional exploration and cognitive insight by externalizing internal conflicts. The scene performed typically revolves around unresolved issues, problematic relationships, future anxieties, or repressed memories. While the physical action is restricted to the protagonist, the presence of the **audience** (the rest of the group) is crucial. This group functions as a reflective mirror and a secure container for the emotional intensity generated by the performance. The definition provided in standard psychological texts emphasizes this dual nature: "In monodrama, one actor, within a group, will act out a scene which is then evaluated by the group as a whole," highlighting the essential role of the collective processing that follows the individual action.

The distinction between monodrama and full psychodrama is paramount to understanding its methodology. Psychodrama involves the detailed representation of life situations with the assistance of other group members (auxiliary egos) who step into the roles required by the scene, thus creating a dynamic, interpersonal enactment. Conversely, monodrama necessitates that the protagonist utilizes only the stage area and their own imaginative and expressive capacity to portray all facets of the internal and external world relevant to their conflict. This intensity of solitary focus often proves highly effective for individuals who struggle with interpersonal vulnerability or require a high degree of control over their therapeutic narrative before integrating others.

2. Historical Roots in Action Methods

Monodrama is inextricably linked to the work of **Jacob Levy Moreno** (1889-1974), the founder of psychodrama, sociometry, and group psychotherapy. Moreno began developing his methods in

Vienna in the early 20th century, seeking an alternative to conventional psychoanalysis that focused on spontaneity and action rather than mere verbal recall. Moreno's initial explorations utilized the Theatre of Spontaneity, where actors improvised scenes based on current events or audience suggestions, proving the therapeutic power of unscripted dramatic creation.

While Moreno's core model was psychodrama, designed for group integration and interpersonal learning, monodrama evolved subsequently as a necessary modification for specific clinical needs. Early practitioners recognized that some individuals found it too challenging or overwhelming to immediately engage in full role-play with others, or that certain highly personal, traumatic, or highly internalized conflicts were best explored initially without the literal presence of auxiliary participants. Therefore, monodrama developed not as an entirely separate theory, but as a critical technical variation within the psychodramatic framework, allowing the protagonist to work through deep internal fragmentation before engaging in externalized relational work.

The transition toward formalizing monodrama recognized the therapeutic value of the singular focus. It allowed the protagonist to fully inhabit both sides of an internal dialogue--such as the conflict between their "should self" and their "want self"--without the mediation of another person. This method retained Moreno's central tenets: utilizing **action** to overcome psychological resistance, harnessing **spontaneity** to access deeper truths, and promoting **catharsis** through emotional expression in a safe, structured environment. Thus, the history of monodrama reflects the refinement of action techniques to address a wider range of psychological presentations, prioritizing self-integration through self-enactment.

3. The Structure of a Monodrama Session

A typical monodrama session follows a predictable, structured pattern adapted from psychodramatic methodology, ensuring safety and maximizing therapeutic yield. These stages are conventionally divided into the **warm-up**, the **action** phase, and the **sharing** phase. The facilitator, or director, guides the protagonist through these stages, moving from general preparation to intense emotional work, and finally, to cognitive integration.

The **warm-up** is essential for easing the protagonist and the group into the therapeutic process. It involves activities designed to increase focus, build group cohesion, and encourage spontaneity. The protagonist identifies the subject matter they wish to explore. The director assists in defining the initial scene, establishing the location, time, and the key conflict. This preparatory phase aims to lower defensive barriers and transition the protagonist from their everyday reality into the "surplus reality" of the psychodrama stage, where internal truths can be safely explored.

The **action phase** is where the monodrama unfolds. The protagonist uses the stage space to represent different elements of their scene. Crucial techniques are employed here, such as the use of empty chairs or cushions to represent other people (the technique of the empty chair), or

physical placement on the stage to signify internal divisions or emotional distance. The director may prompt the protagonist to engage in **soliloquy**, verbalizing thoughts and feelings they might suppress in real life, or encourage **role reversal**, where the protagonist physically moves to the empty chair and speaks as the person or element they are in conflict with, thereby gaining immediate empathic insight into the other perspective. This phase is intense and typically culminates in a cathartic release or a decisive behavioral shift, such as practicing a new response to a recurring problem.

Following the action, the **sharing phase** ensures that the experience is integrated both by the protagonist and the group. Crucially, the group does not offer analytical interpretations or judgmental feedback on the protagonist's performance or life choices. Instead, group members share their own brief, parallel experiences or feelings that were evoked by the protagonist's work. This sharing confirms the universality of human experience, reduces the protagonist's sense of isolation, and provides emotional support without violating the therapeutic boundary by offering uninvited advice. The group's role shifts from passive observers to active confirmers of shared humanity, solidifying the safety of the therapeutic setting.

4. Therapeutic Mechanisms and Objectives

The effectiveness of monodrama rests upon several powerful therapeutic mechanisms inherent in action methods. Chief among these is **catharsis**, the intense emotional release achieved through dramatic enactment. By physically manifesting long-repressed emotions or traumatic memories, the protagonist can discharge pent-up emotional energy, often leading to immediate, albeit temporary, relief. However, monodrama emphasizes that catharsis must be accompanied by insight--it is not merely an emotional purge but a step toward cognitive restructuring.

Another key mechanism is the development of **spontaneity and creativity**. Moreno defined spontaneity as the capacity to respond adequately to new situations or respond freshly to old ones. By forcing the protagonist to improvise and create a scene instantaneously, monodrama bypasses rigid, habitual defensive patterns. The protagonist practices new behaviors and verbal responses in the safe "surplus reality" of the stage, developing a larger repertoire of actions they can transfer to real-life situations. This rehearsal for life is a core objective, particularly when addressing social anxiety or difficulties in assertion.

Furthermore, monodrama facilitates **insight and self-integration**. By externalizing the internal world--placing different aspects of the self (e.g., the critical parent, the vulnerable child) in different physical locations--the protagonist can literally look at their fragmented self from an objective distance. The use of techniques like role reversal with an internal part allows the individual to understand the motivations behind their own conflicting drives. This process helps resolve internal conflicts, leading to a more coherent sense of self and reduced internal psychological warfare.

5. Key Characteristics and Techniques

Protagonist-Centered Focus: The entire session revolves around the emotional needs and chosen conflict of the single protagonist. The director's guidance is specifically aimed at deepening this individual's exploration, contrasting sharply with sociodrama or group psychodrama, which focus on universal group themes.

The Use of the Double: Although monodrama typically excludes auxiliary egos, the concept of **doubling** can still be employed. In this context, the protagonist may physically step into the role of their own double--a part of themselves that holds a feeling they are denying--to vocalize suppressed thoughts or provide support from within the self, making the internal dialogue explicit.

Soliloquy and Internal Dialogue: The technique relies heavily on the protagonist's ability to articulate their internal world. Soliloquy involves speaking one's thoughts aloud, giving voice to motivations, fears, and judgments that are usually hidden. This transparency is crucial for the director to track the internal landscape and for the protagonist to gain self-awareness.

Maximum Use of Props and Space: Because no other actors are present, the protagonist must skillfully use the stage, props (chairs, scarves, etc.), and distinct physical locations to differentiate between the various characters or aspects being represented. The physical boundary of the stage becomes the boundary of the protagonist's current psychological world.

6. Applications in Clinical Settings

Monodrama is a highly adaptable therapeutic tool used across various clinical settings, particularly where individualized, intensive emotional work is required without the immediate complicating factors of interpersonal dynamics. It is frequently employed in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), complex grief, and identity issues. For survivors of trauma, the contained, controlled environment of the monodrama stage allows them to safely re-encounter traumatic memories by taking on different roles within the memory, thus shifting from passive victimhood to active agent of the narrative.

Furthermore, monodrama is exceptionally useful for individuals experiencing profound internal conflict or ambivalence, such as those struggling with addiction, career changes, or major life decisions. By staging the conflict--for example, the "addictive voice" versus the "healthy self"--the protagonist can externalize and debate these opposing forces. This dramatization provides clarity and allows the protagonist to test new resolutions, making the abstract conflict concrete and actionable.

In the context of standard group psychotherapy, monodrama serves as an excellent intermediary step. A group member who is hesitant or unable to engage fully in interpersonal role-play due to

anxiety or profound self-consciousness can begin with monodrama. This allows them to build therapeutic trust with the director and the group while retaining control over the pace and intensity of their self-disclosure, effectively preparing them for more complex group interventions later in the therapeutic process.

7. Limitations and Criticisms

Despite its clear therapeutic benefits, monodrama is subject to limitations, both logistical and theoretical. A major criticism concerns the inherent subjectivity and potential for therapeutic isolation. Since the protagonist is acting out all roles, there is a risk that the portrayal of significant others or conflicting parts of the self may be distorted or entirely based on the protagonist's existing psychological defenses, reinforcing rather than challenging their perspective. Without the immediate corrective feedback of an actual person in an auxiliary role, the director must work diligently to ensure the role-play remains productive and challenging.

Another practical limitation relates to the demands placed on the protagonist. Monodrama requires a high degree of imaginative capacity, emotional availability, and courage. Individuals who are highly repressed, lack imaginative resources, or suffer from severe dissociation may find the technique overly taxing or inaccessible. In these cases, simpler verbal or movement-based therapies might be required before attempting monodramatic enactment.

Finally, as a highly specialized technique derived from psychodrama, monodrama requires extensive training on the part of the facilitator. The director must be skilled not only in group dynamics and psychological assessment but also in directing theatrical action, knowing when to intervene, when to encourage, and how to safely contain potentially overwhelming emotional discharges (catharsis). A poorly directed monodrama session can be highly dysregulating for the protagonist, leading to a sense of exposure or re-traumatization rather than healing.

Further Reading

[Psychodrama \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[The British Psychodrama Association: J.L. Moreno](#)

[Understanding Drama Therapy and Action Methods](#)