

Destigmatizing the liminal space: episodic drama therapy sessions in acute inpatient psychiatry

Gabrielle Fidis

This workshop explores the therapeutic space through the lens of drama therapy on an acute inpatient psychiatry unit. My goal as a group facilitator is to create a safe enough space for patients to engage in the process of developing new internal systems and behaviors. By using interventions based in Theatre of the Oppressed, Playback Theatre, and Developmental Transformations, I have observed patients in empowered behaviors, and a renewed ability to think critically and thoughtfully about how they see themselves. Additionally, these practices have supported patients by providing them with tools to challenge structures of power and navigate their communities, while also living with a severe mental illness diagnosis.

“Inpatient psychiatry” is a phrase layered in stigmas and assumptions, which even make their way into the schemas of our own patients. I believe that patients can work to break down their own stigmas towards mental health care and scaffold lives that they hope to achieve, in spite of their diagnoses. I want participants to think about the challenges of accessing the liminal space of growth and change in the context of inpatient psychiatry, which is “episodic”, just as Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre, in that it is “a montage of scenes” that “can be presented in a series of non-linear scenes” (Basuki, 2002), causing a non-linear therapeutic process. Participants will be led through an experiential process using elements of the practices mentioned above, in order to begin building an awareness of how the therapeutic space is very challenging to access, and also how it can be a highly valuable portion of an inpatient admission. The goal of this workshop is to demonstrate how drama therapy can be an integral tool in the deconstruction of oppression and stigmas towards mental health care for people living with severe mental illness in inpatient psychiatry.

Biography

Gabrielle Fidis is a recent graduate of the Drama Therapy Master's program at New York University, and she received her bachelor's degree in Dance & Theatre from Manhattanville College. Currently, Gabrielle is working as a creative arts therapist at Bellevue Hospital in New York in adult acute inpatient psychiatry. She works with a multidisciplinary treatment team on a dual diagnosis unit focusing on treating patients with substance use disorders as well as psychosis. Outside of her work, Gabrielle is the newly elected secretary on the executive board of her community theatre group, The Parkside Players, located in Forest Hills. She has been a member since 2016, engaging in creating quality live theatre for the local community.