

Between worlds: The myth of Tiresias in the psychodramatic exploration of gender fluidity

Anastasia Diotima Golema^{1*} , Mark Matthew Palmer^{2,3,4} 

ABSTRACT

This qualitative single-case study examined how the myth of Tiresias functioned as a symbolic mediator within an individual psychodrama psychotherapy process involving a gender-fluid client. Rather than serving as a model of gender identity, Tiresias gradually emerged as a transitional symbolic space through which conflicting self-experiences could be expressed, explored, and psychologically integrated within the therapeutic relationship. Through symbolic role-taking, dramatic enactment, and collaborative meaning-making, the client developed an increased capacity to engage with ambiguity, sustain dialogue between different self-states, and relate more flexibly to psychological complexity. The findings suggested that the therapeutic value of myth lies not in defining identity but in creating a symbolic and relational space through which identity can be explored and negotiated. The findings highlight the contribution of psychodrama to contemporary gender-affirming psychotherapy and its broader relational and sociocultural implications.

KEYWORDS: Psychodrama; Therapeutic alliance; Gender identity; Symbolic processes.

Entre mundos: O mito de Tirésias na exploração psicodramática da fluidez de gênero

RESUMO

Este estudo qualitativo de caso único examinou como o mito de Tirésias funcionou como mediador simbólico em um processo de psicoterapia psicodramática individual com uma pessoa de gênero fluido. Em vez de servir como modelo de identidade de gênero, Tirésias emergiu gradualmente como um espaço simbólico transicional por meio do qual experiências conflitantes do *self* puderam ser expressas, exploradas e psicologicamente integradas na relação terapêutica. Por meio da tomada de papéis simbólicos, da dramatização e da construção compartilhada de significados, o cliente desenvolveu maior capacidade para lidar com a ambiguidade, sustentar o diálogo entre diferentes estados do *self* e relacionar-se de forma mais flexível com a complexidade psicológica. Os achados destacam a contribuição do psicodrama para a psicoterapia afirmativa de gênero contemporânea e suas implicações relacionais e socioculturais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Psicodrama; Aliança terapêutica; Identidade de gênero; Processos simbólicos.

Entre mundos: El mito de Tiresias en la exploración psicodramática de la fluidez de género

RESUMEN

Este estudio cualitativo de caso único examinó cómo el mito de Tiresias funcionó como mediador simbólico en un proceso de psicoterapia psicodramática individual con una persona de género fluido. En lugar de servir como modelo de identidad de género, Tiresias emergió gradualmente como un espacio simbólico transicional a través del cual las experiencias conflictivas del *self* mismo pudieron ser expresadas, exploradas e integradas psicológicamente dentro de la relación terapéutica. Mediante la toma de roles simbólicos, la dramatización y la construcción compartida de significados, la persona desarrolló una mayor capacidad para afrontar la ambigüedad, sostener el diálogo entre diferentes estados del *self* mismo y relacionarse de manera más flexible con la complejidad psicológica. Los hallazgos destacan la contribución del psicodrama a la psicoterapia afirmativa de género contemporánea y sus implicaciones relacionales y socioculturales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Psicodrama; Alianza terapéutica; Identidad de género; Procesos simbólicos.

1. Theater Therapy: A Research Space for Theater and Psychodrama – Athens, Attica, Greece.

2. PCI College – Dublin, Ireland.

3. The Guild of Analytical Psychologists – London, United Kingdom.

4. British Psychotherapy Foundation – London, United Kingdom.

*Corresponding author: theatertherapy@yahoo.com

Received: July 5, 2026 | Accepted: Aug 8, 2026

Section editor: Aroldo de Lara Cardoso Júnior 

INTRODUCTION

Gender identity is increasingly understood as a dynamic, relational, and embodied process rather than a fixed or binary characteristic (Richards et al., 2016; Testa et al., 2015). Contemporary approaches emphasize that gender emerges through the interaction of embodiment, subjective meaning, social recognition, and personal history rather than reflecting a fixed characteristic (Adler, 2012; McLean et al., 2007). From this perspective, gender identity is understood as an evolving psychological process that develops within interpersonal, cultural, and developmental contexts.

At the same time, contemporary understandings of gender have been significantly shaped by queer theory, contemporary gender scholarship, and decolonial perspectives, which conceptualize gender as a relational, embodied, socially and politically situated process rather than a fixed psychological essence (Butler, 1990; Carter, 2024a; Lugones, 2007; Tyminski, 2024). These perspectives challenge essentialist and binary models of identity by emphasizing the performative, contextual, and historically situated character of gender, as well as the multiplicity and fluidity of gendered experience. The present study therefore understands archetypal images as symbolic and relational patterns of experience whose meanings emerge within the individual's developmental, cultural, and therapeutic context, rather than as fixed expressions of biological sex or universal gender categories. Accordingly, the symbolic masculine and feminine are understood through the Jungian concepts of *anima* and *animus* as symbolic psychological functions whose meaning emerges phenomenologically from the client's developmental, relational, and sociocultural experience rather than from biological sex or fixed gender identities (Carter, 2024b; Jung, 1968; 1969; Tyminski, 2024).

These developments have important implications for psychotherapy. Rather than directing individuals toward predetermined identity categories, psychotherapy offers a relational space in which multiple aspects of the self can be explored with curiosity, safety, and openness. The quality of the therapeutic alliance has consistently been identified as one of the strongest predictors of therapeutic outcome across different theoretical orientations, providing the conditions necessary for psychological exploration, emotional regulation, and identity development (Flückiger et al., 2018; Norcross & Lambert, 2018). Within such a relational context, experiences that may initially feel contradictory or fragmented can gradually become available for reflection and integration.

Across psychotherapeutic traditions, myths have been understood as symbolic narratives that help organize human experience and provide meaning to psychological conflicts (Jung, 1968). Contemporary Jungian perspectives further emphasize that archetypal narratives acquire psychological significance through personal meaning-making rather than through fixed symbolic interpretations (Carter, 2024b). Narrative and constructivist approaches similarly suggest that meaning emerges through the interaction between lived experience and symbolic representation, supporting the re-authoring of experience and identity.

Among the myths of classical antiquity, the story of Tiresias offers a particularly powerful symbolic framework for exploring questions of identity, transformation, and psychological multiplicity. Although Tiresias is a figure of Greek mythology, the myth recounts an experience of having lived in both male and female forms is preserved most fully in Ovid's (2004) *Metamorphoses*. The myth of Tiresias does not simply describe a change of sex; rather, it represents the possibility of inhabiting different experiential positions within the same lifetime. From a psychological perspective, Tiresias may therefore be understood as a symbolic figure capable of holding multiple perspectives simultaneously. His/her prophetic insight can be interpreted not only as supernatural knowledge but also as the capacity to perceive different realities without reducing them to a single truth (Jung, 1968). Within this study, Tiresias is approached not as an identity model or an explanation of gender diversity, but as a symbolic mediator through whom different aspects of the self can be expressed, witnessed and brought into dialogue.

In psychodramatic practice, symbolic role-taking, dramatic enactment, and dialogical processes create opportunities for different self-states to encounter one another without requiring immediate resolution or integration. Through these experiential

methods, individuals may temporarily inhabit perspectives that would otherwise remain inaccessible, allowing psychological complexity to be explored rather than simplified. In this sense, the myth functions not as an interpretive framework imposed upon experience but as a transitional symbolic space that supports reflection, imagination, and emotional processing within the therapeutic relationship (Winnicott, 1971).

Despite increasing research on gender diversity, psychodrama and symbolic approaches to identity, little attention has been given to how myth may function as a symbolic resource within the therapeutic alliance during psychotherapy. Although the therapeutic alliance has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of therapeutic outcome (Flückiger et al., 2018; Horvath et al., 2011; Norcross & Lambert, 2018), existing literature has largely examined myth either as a cultural narrative or as a theoretical construct, while its emergence as a co-constructed therapeutic process within psychodramatic practice remains insufficiently explored.

Although the present study focused on an individual psychotherapy process, it is informed by the psychodramatic principle that individual experience is always embedded within relational, group, and social contexts. From Moreno's sociogenic perspective (Moreno, 1946), experiences of gender and sexuality are co-constructed through interpersonal relationships, cultural narratives, and socially shared role expectations. Consequently, the psychodramatic space may be understood not only as a setting for individual psychological exploration but also as a relational and sociogenic space in which socially dominant meanings of gender and sexuality can be questioned, renegotiated, and transformed through symbolic action. In this sense, although grounded in an individual psychotherapy process, the present case contributes to broader discussions on gender, sexuality, and group processes by illustrating how psychodramatic work may both reflect and reshape the social roles and relational dynamics through which gendered experience is constructed.

Contemporary gender-affirming psychotherapy emphasizes self-determination, exploration, and the development of personally meaningful identities rather than directing individuals toward predetermined gender categories (Ashley, 2019; Richards et al., 2016). This perspective represents an important shift from earlier psychotherapeutic traditions that have often conceptualized gender diversity within binary or pathologizing frameworks (Richards et al., 2016). In this context, psychodrama offers a particularly relevant therapeutic approach because its action methods enable clients to explore multiple symbolic positions without requiring a predetermined identity outcome (Cruz et al., 2018).

Beyond the individual clinical case, the present study contributes to the development of gender-affirming psychotherapeutic practice by illustrating how symbolic role-taking, myth, and the therapeutic alliance may support gender exploration. Rather than presenting a model of gender identity, the case demonstrated how psychodramatic methods may expand contemporary psychotherapeutic practice through symbolic and relational processes.

The present case study addresses this gap by examining how the myth of Tiresias came to occupy a central position within an individual psychodrama psychotherapy process and how its symbolic function developed through the therapeutic relationship. Attention is given to the ways in which symbolic exploration, symbolic role-taking, and the therapeutic alliance supported the exploration of gender fluidity, psychological multiplicity, and identity negotiation.

The research question posed was: How does the therapeutic alliance facilitate the exploration of gender fluidity through the symbolic use of the myth of Tiresias in an individual psychodrama psychotherapy process?

The aim of this study was to examine the function of the myth of Tiresias in supporting the therapeutic alliance in a psychodramatic exploration of gender fluidity within an individual psychotherapy process. The study pursued three specific objectives:

- To explore how the therapeutic alliance supported the client's exploration of gender identity;
- To examine the function of the myth of Tiresias within psychodramatic symbolic role-taking and dramatic enactment;
- To investigate the therapeutic significance of resistance and treatment interruption during the process of identity transformation.

METHOD

Study design

A qualitative single-case study was used, as this design is particularly appropriate for investigating complex psychological phenomena within their natural therapeutic context, in which subjective experience, meaning-making, and relational processes can be explored in depth rather than statistically generalized (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Levitt et al., 2018). The study adopted an interpretive and constructivist qualitative approach while recognizing that experiences of gender are shaped through psychological, interpersonal, cultural, and sociopolitical processes (Butler, 1990; Carter, 2024a; Tyminski, 2024). Rather than viewing gender identity as a fixed category, the study sought to understand how symbolic processes emerging within psychotherapy enabled the exploration of multiple and evolving experiences of self.

Participant

The participant was an adult individual, with the pseudonym Jean, who self-identified as gender-fluid and attended weekly individual psychodrama psychotherapy over the course of approximately one year. In keeping with qualitative case-study methodology, which prioritizes faithful representation of participants' own language and self-identification, the pronouns he/she and his/her are used throughout this article, reflecting the participant's preferred self-identification during therapy.

Jean had experienced longstanding difficulties related to gender identity, self-expression, and the integration of symbolic masculine and feminine dimensions of experience, understood here in the Jungian sense rather than as references to biological sex or gender categories. In this study, these symbolic dimensions are understood as archetypal images of psychological experience rather than biologically determined or essential gender categories, consistent with contemporary Jungian reinterpretations of archetypal theory (Carter, 2024a; Tyminski, 2024). Their psychological meaning was therefore explored phenomenologically through the participant's own lived experience rather than being inferred from predefined symbolic interpretations.

The case was selected purposively because it offered a particularly rich opportunity to explore the use of myth within an individual psychodrama psychotherapy process. During the therapy, the myth of Tiresias naturally emerged as one of the central symbolic references, providing a shared framework for exploring ambiguity, multiplicity, and identity.

Therapeutic process

The therapeutic process was informed by classical psychodramatic principles involving spontaneity, role theory, dramatic enactment, and action (Blatner, 2000; Cruz et al., 2018; Moreno, 1946; Orkibi, 2021). Role reversal with significant others, together with symbolic role-taking and self-unfolding to explore different symbolic dimensions of the self, were integrated throughout the therapeutic process, alongside doubling, dialogue, and other action methods (Cruz et al., 2018; Schweitzer & Kersbaumer, 2022).

The mythic framework adopted in this study is also consistent with the understanding of psychodramatic ritual as a mythopoetic process in which symbolic enactment facilitates psychological transformation through the construction of meaning (Cardoso Jr. & Wahba, 2021). Rather than introducing the myth as a predetermined therapeutic intervention, Tiresias emerged organically in response to Jean's exploration of identity. The therapeutic focus remained on the participant's lived experience of the symbolic image rather than on interpreting Tiresias according to a predetermined mythological meaning. It gradually became a shared symbolic resource through which different self-states could be expressed and brought into dialogue.

This mythopoetic process also involved the therapist, whose own symbolic and mythic resources contributed to understanding Jean's experience. In psychodramatic practice, the therapist's symbolic awareness and reflective engagement are themselves part of the therapeutic process, supporting both clinical understanding and professional development

(Manrique & Stefani, 2022). Rather than remaining a neutral observer, the therapist participated in a shared symbolic field in which the myth acquired meaning through the therapeutic relationship, a process consistent with Jungian conceptions of shared symbolic reality and participation mystique (Manrique & Stefani, 2022; Winborn, 2014).

Throughout therapy, the emphasis remained on facilitating exploration rather than directing the client toward a predetermined identity position consistent with principles of contemporary gender-affirming psychotherapy (Ashley, 2019; Richards et al., 2016).

Data collection

Data included contemporaneous clinical notes, descriptions of psychodramatic enactments, and reflective process notes during the therapeutic process. Attention was given to the sessions in which symbolic material was most prominent—psychodramatic enactments around Tiresias, the exchange of thoughts and feelings between different self-states, and moments of emotional or relational transformation.

Only material directly relevant to the research question was included in the analysis.

Data analysis

The material was analyzed with reflexive thematic analysis, focusing on recurring themes, dramatic role configurations, internal dialogues, and relational processes that emerged during psychotherapy (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021; Levitt et al., 2018).

The analysis was conducted in phases, moving iteratively between the clinical material and theoretical literature. The analysis focused on Tiresias's evolving function, the formation of the therapeutic alliance, feelings of resistance, and how different self-states were expressed through psychodramatic action. Our aim was not to validate theoretical assumptions but to understand how symbolic meanings were developed in the therapeutic process.

The credibility of the analysis was enhanced through prolonged therapeutic engagement, iterative movement between the clinical material and the emerging themes, and continuous reflexive consideration of the researcher's interpretive position throughout the analytic process (Levitt et al., 2018).

Ethical considerations

Ethical concerns were relevant throughout the research. All identifying information has been anonymized, and the client is presented under the pseudonym Jean. To further protect confidentiality, selected contextual and biographical details, including occupational information, relational circumstances, and other potentially identifying characteristics, were intentionally modified while preserving the clinical meaning of the material.

The study was conducted in accordance with the directives established by Resolution No. 466/2012 and Resolution No. 510/2016 of the Brazilian National Health Council (Conselho Nacional de Saúde, 2012; 2016). Written informed consent was obtained from the participant for the anonymous use of clinical material for research and publication purposes.

Throughout this article, the participant is referred to using the pronouns he/she and his/her. This decision reflects the participant's own preferred self-identification during therapy. In accordance with ethical principles of participant self-determination, the author chose to preserve the participant's expressed use of pronouns rather than substitute gender-neutral pronouns. This decision should not be interpreted as privileging binary language; rather, it reflects respect for the participant's own way of describing a gender-fluid identity while acknowledging the importance of inclusive and non-cisnormative language in contemporary scholarship.

The client's autonomy, subjective experience, and self-determination were central throughout both the therapeutic and research processes, particularly in the context of gender diversity and gender-affirming psychotherapy (Richards et al., 2016).

The therapeutic material was presented with respect for the client's dignity, autonomy, and subjective experience, without pathologizing gender diversity.

The myth of Tiresias was also treated as a tool for reflection rather than an explanation of identity in this research. Symbolic interpretations were tentative and collaborative in nature, understanding that myths acquire psychological meaning only through the client's own experiences. Thus, archetypal images were viewed as open possibilities rather than fixed constructs defining identity (Jung, 1968).

The aim of therapy was not to define or prescribe identity but to create a psychologically safe space in which ambiguity, multiplicity, and personal meaning could be explored collaboratively.

RESULTS

Experiencing internal polarization

The therapeutic process began with Jean describing a profound sense of internal conflict regarding gender identity. Although assigned male at birth, Jean self-identified as gender-fluid and experienced persistent difficulties integrating different aspects of gender identity and self-expression. At a symbolic level, these struggles were also reflected in the tension between symbolic masculine and feminine dimensions of experience, understood in the Jungian sense rather than as binary gender categories. For Jean, these symbolic dimensions were experienced as incompatible rather than complementary, giving rise to significant psychological distress. Jean frequently described feeling "between two worlds" and expressed uncertainty about how to develop a coherent sense of self. Rather than encouraging identification with a predetermined gender category, the therapeutic process focused on exploring these symbolic dimensions while supporting Jean's capacity to remain engaged with their tension and ambiguity.

Jean didn't express a clear desire to transition to a fixed gender identity but did express that it was difficult to live in experiences that did not fit within a predetermined category. The sessions were characterized by moments of openness and periods of withdrawal. When more emotion emerged, it was often followed by anxiety, hesitation, or a desire to withdraw from the therapeutic process.

As therapy progressed, Jean's main concern was not about expressing a feminine identity itself but the fear of losing psychological constructs that had long provided safety and continuity. Self-expression was frequently associated with vulnerability, uncertainty, and the possibility of upending the established ways of relating to both the self and others. This was the pattern throughout therapy's early days: authentic thinking was frequently accompanied by feelings of exposure, rejection, and loss of belonging.

The therapeutic relationship gradually created a safe context in which these experiences could be expressed more openly. The therapeutic process did not seek to resolve these contradictions; rather, it created a relational space in which different self-states could be expressed, reflected upon, and held in dialogue. Over time, Jean became increasingly able to acknowledge conflicting emotions without immediately dismissing one in favor of the other, resulting in a deeper and more reflective engagement with internal experience.

The emergence of Tiresias as a symbolic resource

As therapy progressed, symbolic material started to emerge spontaneously in the psychodramatic process. The myth of Tiresias emerged within the therapeutic dialogue and became a significant part of the therapeutic landscape, offering a language through which experiences that had previously been difficult to articulate could be addressed more directly. The emergence of Tiresias reflected the possibility of moving beyond a binary perspective. For Jean, the myth created a symbolic space in which the tension between the symbolic masculine and feminine dimensions of experience could be

explored more freely, without the pressure to identify exclusively with either position. Across successive sessions, Tiresias gradually evolved from a mythological figure into a shared symbolic language through which previously unexpressed experiences could be explored.

Dialogue between self-states through psychodramatic enactment

As the therapeutic process evolved, psychodramatic enactment provided a means through which different aspects of Jean's internal experience could become externalized and engaged with directly. Rather than discussing conflicting emotions abstractly, Jean expressed different psychological positions through dramatic action. This shift from verbal reflection to enactment enabled previously disconnected experiences to become more visible, emotionally accessible, and available for exploration.

Symbolic role-taking and self-unfolding constituted the central psychodramatic techniques during this phase of therapy. By moving between these symbolic roles, Jean explored emotional perspectives that had previously been experienced as incompatible. The symbolic masculine and feminine dimensions of experience—understood as subjective Jungian psychological images rather than as essentialist binary gender categories—gradually acquired distinct voices, emotions, and relational positions within the enactments. Rather than remaining sources of internal conflict, these symbolic dimensions became active participants in the therapeutic process.

During several enactments, dialogues unfolded between the symbolic masculine and feminine dimensions of experience, as previously defined in a contemporary Jungian sense. For Jean, the symbolic masculine dimension came to represent safety, familiarity, continuity, and protection, whereas the symbolic feminine dimension became associated with authenticity, emotional openness, spontaneity, and freedom of self-expression. These symbolic associations emerged through the therapeutic process and reflected Jean's own meaning-making rather than essential characteristics of the symbolic masculine and feminine.

Throughout the sessions, Jean increasingly engaged in self-unfolding through symbolic role-taking, moving between the symbolic dimensions of experience. By enacting these different symbolic positions, emotions that had previously remained difficult to express—including fear of rejection, grief over the possible loss of significant relationships, and hope for a more authentic way of living—became increasingly accessible. These enactments enabled both Jean and the therapist to witness and reflect upon emotionally complex experiences without requiring immediate interpretation.

The therapeutic work also revealed a gradual transformation in Jean's internal dialogue. Through repeated processes of symbolic role-taking and self-unfolding, different symbolic dimensions of experience were externalized and brought into dialogue within the psychodramatic space. Experiences that had previously remained fused in internal conflict became observable, expressible, and available for reflection. Consequently, earlier patterns of self-criticism and attempts to suppress contradictory experiences gradually gave way to greater curiosity and reflective engagement. Different self-states became increasingly able to coexist, while curiosity progressively replaced the need to resolve internal contradictions. The psychodramatic space thus functioned as a relational context in which multiple perspectives could be acknowledged, explored, and held together rather than avoided.

As therapy progressed, the dramatic interactions became less concerned with choosing between different identity positions and more focused on facilitating communication between previously isolated aspects of experience. The emphasis shifted from resolving internal opposition to sustaining an ongoing dialogue between different self-states, enabling Jean to engage with psychological complexity in a more open, emotionally connected, and reflective way.

Towards the end of this phase, Jean increasingly demonstrated the capacity to remain within emotionally demanding enactments without interrupting the dramatic process or withdrawing from the interaction. Enactments that had previously evoked immediate uncertainty or avoidance became more sustained and emotionally accessible, suggesting an increased capacity to engage with complex internal experiences.

Increasing capacity to embrace ambiguity

By the later stages of therapy, clear changes emerged in the way Jean associated with internal conflict. Questions about gender identity remained open but they didn't seem to have the same urgency to be resolved. Rather than experiencing contradictory aspects of the self as mutually exclusive, Jean began to find ways to be amid all those emotions without feeling compelled to privilege one over the other. This shift became particularly evident during psychodramatic enactments. Earlier sessions were characterized by abrupt interruptions, hesitation, or withdrawal whenever emotionally difficult material surfaced. In later sessions, however, Jean became increasingly able to remain engaged even when experiencing uncertainty, vulnerability, or conflicting emotions.

Changes also emerged in the quality of Jean's internal dialogue. Self-criticism and internal opposition gradually gave way to greater curiosity, reflection, and emotional openness. During role enactments, the previously defined masculine and feminine dimensions of experience increasingly interacted without one invalidating or suppressing the other. Rather than compelling Jean to identify exclusively with either symbolic position, the psychodramatic process created a therapeutic space in which both could be explored without requiring a definitive resolution. Although tensions surrounding the definition of a gender identity remained, Jean became increasingly able to engage with them in a more reflective and less polarized way. Whereas early enactments were characterized by anxiety, internal conflict, and an urgent need to resolve opposing aspects of identity, later encounters were marked by greater emotional regulation, mutual recognition between self-states, and an increased capacity to embrace ambiguity.

The presence of Tiresias remained a central point of reference throughout this phase. The myth was not a solution to questions of identity but rather a symbolic language that enabled Jean to revisit emotionally complex experiences from new perspectives over time. Jean became more comfortable returning to the symbolic figure not in search of certainty but to revisit his/her own emotional experiences from different perspectives.

The therapeutic process also showed that periods of psychological openness alternated with periods of uncertainty and emotional retreat, but these fluctuations were less disruptive over time. Experiences that had previously led to withdrawal increasingly became occasions for therapeutic exploration, allowing difficult emotions to be expressed without interrupting the therapeutic process.

By the conclusion of therapy, the therapeutic focus had shifted from answering questions on identity to maintaining a dialogue with different aspects of experience. Jean described feeling more genuine and emotional while still being aware of the interplay between multiple self-states. At the same time, ambiguity was felt with less fear and more acceptance than in the initial stages of therapy.

DISCUSSION

In this qualitative case study, the myth of Tiresias functioned as a symbolic mediator within individual psychodrama psychotherapy process involving a gender-fluid client. Rather than serving as an explanatory model of gender identity, the myth gradually became a symbolic resource through which Jean explored, expressed, and reflected upon lived experiences of gender. The findings suggest that Tiresias neither explained gender identity nor guided the participant toward a predetermined identity position. Instead, the myth created a transitional symbolic space in which ambiguity, multiplicity, and psychological complexity could be explored, reflected upon, and gradually integrated into an evolving sense of self. This symbolic process did not seek to universalize gender-diverse experience but illustrates how myth, within psychodrama psychotherapy, can facilitate personal meaning-making while remaining attentive to the participant's unique relational, cultural, and social context.

One of the main findings of this study was that therapeutic change did not involve movement from one identity category to another. Rather, it reflected a gradual transition from internal polarization toward an increased capacity to sustain dialogue between different self-states. This process was made possible within a therapeutic relationship that provided

sufficient relational safety for ambiguity, contradiction, and emotionally complex experiences to be explored without requiring immediate resolution. Instead of reducing contradiction, psychotherapy supported Jean's capacity to remain engaged with complexity while maintaining a greater sense of psychological continuity. These findings are consistent with contemporary perspectives that conceptualize identity as a dynamic, relational, and developmental process rather than a fixed or essential characteristic (Adler, 2012; McLean et al., 2007; Richards et al., 2016).

Another important finding concerns the contribution of psychodramatic enactment to symbolic exploration. Dramatic action enabled emotionally complex experiences to become visible, relational, and available for reflection without requiring immediate resolution. Rather than replacing lived experience, enactment created opportunities for new meanings to emerge through embodied action and shared symbolic engagement. These findings are consistent with contemporary psychodrama literature emphasizing dramatic enactment, role flexibility, and spontaneity as central mechanisms of psychological development (Cruz et al., 2018).

At the same time, this therapeutic approach presents some limitations. Although the therapeutic alliance seemed to have created a symbolic and relational space in which non-normative experiences of gender could be explored without immediate pressure for a resolution, sustaining such a liminal position may also increase psychological tension. Exploration of previously undiscovered and unintegrated aspects of identity may challenge established ways of understanding the self and may also give rise to emotional experiences that exceed the client's capacity to manage at a particular stage of therapy. From this perspective, Jean's decision to discontinue therapy may be understood not only as a limitation of the therapeutic process but also as a reflection of the challenges associated with inhabiting this transitional symbolic space. Such an interpretation does not diminish the therapeutic value of the process; rather, it highlights the importance of continually negotiating the pace of therapy, the client's emotional capacity, and the therapeutic goals throughout the exploration of identity.

Taken together, the findings suggest that myth contributes to the therapeutic purpose of identity by expanding the possibilities through which identity can be explored in a trusting therapeutic relationship. From this perspective, the myth of Tiresias was less of a gender story and more of a medium through which one could slowly integrate previously disconnected experiences into the ongoing process of self-exploration.

Tiresias as a transitional symbolic space

One of the main contributions to the present study concerns the therapeutic function of the myth of Tiresias within psychodrama psychotherapy. Rather than serving as a model of gender identity, Tiresias gradually became a symbolic resource through which Jean could engage with experiences that had previously remained emotionally inaccessible. The significance of the myth emerged through Jean's personal meaning-making rather than through any universal interpretation of the myth itself. Rather than prescribing answers to questions of identity, Tiresias provided a shared symbolic language through which previously disconnected aspects of experience could be expressed, explored and reflected upon.

From a therapeutic perspective, the value of Tiresias lay not in the mythological narrative itself but in the symbolic possibilities it opened within the therapeutic relationship. By creating symbolic distance from emotionally charged experiences, the myth enabled Jean to engage with vulnerability, uncertainty, and internal contradiction without becoming overwhelmed. Tiresias facilitated an ongoing process of psychological exploration in which new meanings could emerge through dramatic action and imagination.

This understanding is consistent with Winnicott's (1971) concept of potential space, in which inner and outer reality meet through play, creativity, and symbolic activity. Within psychodrama psychotherapy, this transitional space is enacted through dramatic acting, allowing internal experiences to become visible, relational and emotionally manageable. In the present case, Tiresias functioned as such a transitional symbolic space, supporting exploration while reducing the need for immediate certainty or resolution.

From a contemporary Jungian perspective, the present findings support the view that archetypal images function as symbolic resources for meaning-making rather than as determinants of identity (Carter, 2024b; Jung, 1968; Tyminski, 2024). Within the psychodramatic process, Tiresias became a symbolic role through which previously disconnected self-states could enter into dialogue and be experienced within a shared therapeutic reality. Psychological change did not arise from eliminating internal conflict but from transforming Jean's relationship to that conflict, allowing different experiences to coexist without requiring immediate resolution.

This understanding is also consistent with contemporary psychodrama, which emphasizes symbolic enactment as a means of expanding role flexibility, fostering dialogue, and supporting psychological integration (Cardoso Jr. & Wahba, 2021; Kushnir & Orkibi, 2021). Rather than representing fragmentation, symbolic roles created other relational possibilities through which different aspects of experience could be encountered, reorganized, and gradually integrated into a more coherent personal narrative.

Overall, these findings suggest that the therapeutic value of myth lies not in defining identity but in expanding the symbolic possibilities through which identity can be explored. Within this process, the myth of Tiresias became a shared symbolic language that enabled therapist and client to express, contain, and gradually transform emotionally complex experiences. Rather than explaining gender, the myth created a transitional psychological space in which new meanings could emerge and more flexible ways of relating to the self could gradually develop.

From symbolic identification to psychological integration

The principal contribution of this case study lies in conceptualizing symbolic identification as a therapeutic process that facilitates psychological integration without directing the client toward a predetermined identity outcome. Rather than encouraging Jean to identify with Tiresias as an ideal figure or a model of gender identity, the therapeutic process allowed the myth to function as a symbolic role through which different aspects of experience could be enacted, explored, and gradually integrated. Within the psychodramatic stage, symbolic experience became embodied through dramatic action, allowing previously conflicting narratives to be reorganized within a shared therapeutic space (Cardoso Jr. & Wahba, 2021). Psychological change, therefore, did not emerge from adopting a new identity category but from the increasing capacity to experience multiple self-states within a more coherent and psychologically flexible sense of self.

This understanding is consistent with contemporary perspectives that conceptualize identity as a dynamic, relational, and developmental process rather than a fixed psychological state (Adler, 2012; McLean et al., 2007; Richards et al., 2016). Accordingly, psychotherapy is not primarily concerned with helping clients discover a single *true* identity but with supporting an ongoing process through which different aspects of experience can be related, negotiated and integrated within an evolving sense of self.

This process may also be understood through Bromberg's (1998) concept of multiple self-states, which views psychological health as the capacity to move flexibly between different modes of self-experience while maintaining continuity of self. Consistent with this perspective, Jean's therapeutic development was not characterized by the elimination of internal differences but by an increasing ability to remain emotionally connected to multiple self-states without becoming psychologically fragmented or overwhelmed.

Importantly, this development was neither linear nor free from uncertainty. Periods of increased openness were frequently followed by hesitation, withdrawal, and emotional instability. Rather than indicating therapeutic failure, these oscillations appeared to represent meaningful phases of psychological reorganization. Contemporary relational psychotherapy similarly conceptualizes therapeutic change as an ongoing process of rupture, repair, and renegotiation within the therapeutic relationship (Flückiger et al., 2018; Safran et al., 2011). The present findings suggest that moments of instability may constitute necessary conditions for psychological growth rather than obstacles to it.

From a psychodramatic perspective, symbolic role-taking and dramatic enactment provided an experiential context in which previously disconnected self-states could be externalized, encountered, and reorganized through action. Rather than encouraging Jean to choose between competing identity positions, psychodramatic techniques created opportunities for contradictory experiences to coexist within the dramatic space. Symbolic roles thus became relational positions through which conflicting emotions, memories and desires could be expressed, witnessed and explored without requiring immediate synthesis. This understanding is consistent with contemporary psychodrama literature emphasizing symbolic enactment, role flexibility, and spontaneity as central mechanisms of psychological integration (Cruz et al., 2018).

These findings also resonate with Butler's (1990) understanding of identity as an ongoing process of becoming and with Lugones' (2007) critique of fixed and socially imposed gender categories. Rather than reinforcing normative assumptions about gender, the psychodramatic process created a symbolic and relational space in which dominant gender meanings could be questioned, and alternative ways of experiencing the self could emerge. In this sense, the therapeutic encounter functioned not only as a space for individual psychological exploration but also as a relational context in which socially constructed understandings of gender could be negotiated through symbolic action. From this perspective, the psychodramatic stage may be understood as more than a setting for individual psychological exploration; it also becomes a relational and socioeconomic space in which culturally dominant gender narratives can be questioned, rehearsed, and transformed through symbolic action. In doing so, psychodrama extends the exploration of identity beyond the individual by creating opportunities to renegotiate socially shared meanings of gender within a relational encounter.

This perspective is further supported by contemporary Jungian authors, who understand archetypal experience as compatible with gender diversity and psychological multiplicity (Carter, 2024a; Tyminski, 2024).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the therapeutic value of symbolic exploration lies not in establishing certainty but in sustaining an internal dialogue. Through symbolic role-taking and dramatic enactment within the psychodramatic encounter, Jean was able to externalize, enact, and reflect upon different symbolic dimensions of experience, allowing previously conflicting experiences to be viewed from multiple perspectives and gradually integrated into a more coherent personal narrative. Psychological integration was therefore achieved not through eliminating internal differences but through developing the capacity to reconcile multiple aspects of experience within a more coherent, compassionate, and psychologically flexible sense of self. In this regard, Tiresias did not represent the destination of Jean's journey but rather a symbolic bridge that enabled Jean to gradually inhabit psychological complexity with greater curiosity, acceptance, and emotional continuity.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative case study examined how the myth of Tiresias functioned as a symbolic mediator within an individual psychodrama psychotherapy process involving a gender-fluid client. The findings suggest that the therapeutic value of the myth lies not in defining gender identity or directing clients toward predetermined identity outcomes, but in creating a symbolic and relational space in which identity can be explored, negotiated and gradually integrated through the therapeutic relationship.

Rather than functioning as an explanatory model of gender, Tiresias emerged as a transitional symbolic space through which emotionally complex experiences could be externalized, enacted, and reflected upon within psychodrama psychotherapy. Through symbolic role-taking, dramatic enactment, and collaborative meaning making, the client developed an increased capacity to engage with ambiguity, sustained an internal dialogue between different self-states and related more flexibly to psychological complexity.

Beyond its clinical contribution, the present study also has broader socioeconomic implications. Although grounded in an individual psychotherapy process, it suggests that psychodrama provides a relational and socioeconomic space in which culturally dominant understandings of gender may be questioned, renegotiated, and reimaged through symbolic action. In this sense, the symbolic exploration of myths such as Tiresias extends beyond individual psychological change by illustrating how therapeutic encounters may contribute to the relational and collective processes through which gendered

experience is negotiated. The findings therefore suggest that psychodramatic work with symbolic roles may contribute not only to individual meaning-making but also to broader psychotherapeutic discussions concerning gender, sexuality, and the social construction of identity.

The present study should be interpreted within the limitations of a qualitative single-case design. The findings cannot be generalized to all therapeutic contexts, and the symbolic significance of Tiresias reflects the unique co-construction of meaning between one client and one therapist. Future qualitative research across diverse psychodramatic and cultural settings may further clarify how symbolic narratives, dramatic enactment, and therapeutic relationships contribute to identity development, psychological integration, and meaning making.

Ultimately, the present study proposes that myths do not need to provide answers about identity to be therapeutically meaningful. Their value lies in creating symbolic possibilities through which new meanings, relationships, and ways of experiencing the self may gradually emerge. In this regard, Tiresias represents not a destination or a model of identity, but a symbolic bridge that supports the ongoing psychological process of becoming.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nothing to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this study.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Golema AD; **Methodology:** Golema AD; **Investigation:** Golema AD; **Data curation:** Golema AD; **Writing – Original draft:** Golema AD; **Writing – Review and Editing:** Golema AD and Palmer MM; **Final approval:** Golema AD.

FUNDING

Not applicable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Not applicable.

DECLARATION OF THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS

Generative artificial intelligence (ChatGPT, GPT-5.5) was used exclusively to support technical translation, linguistic editing, and improvement of the academic English style during manuscript preparation. All scientific ideas, methodological decisions, clinical interpretations, analyses, and conclusions were developed and critically reviewed by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the final content.

REFERENCES

Adler, J. M. (2012). Living into the story: Agency and coherence in a longitudinal study of narrative identity development and mental health over the course of psychotherapy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(2), 367-389. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025289>

- Ashley, F. (2019). Gatekeeping hormone replacement therapy for transgender patients is dehumanising. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 45(7), 480-482. <https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2018-105293>
- Blatner, A. (2000). *Foundations of psychodrama: History, theory, and practice* (4th ed.). Springer Publishing Company.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328-352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- Bromberg, P. M. (1998). *Standing in the spaces: Essays on clinical process, trauma, and dissociation*. Analytic Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Cardoso Jr., A. L., & Wahba, L. L. (2021). Um encontro entre psicodrama e psicologia analítica: ritual e mitopoese. *Revista Brasileira de Psicodrama*, 29(3), 237-249. <https://revbraspsicodrama.org.br/rbp/article/view/519/484>
- Carter, M. (2024a). A contemporary overview of gender and sexuality in analytical psychology. *Psychological Perspectives*, 67(4), 472-487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332925.2024.2449799>
- Carter, M. (2024b). LGBTQI+ soul psychology: a model of personal narrative. *Psychological Perspectives*, 67(4), 337-345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332925.2024.2442276>
- Conselho Nacional de Saúde (2012). *Resolução n. 466, de 12 de dezembro de 2012* [Resolution No. 466 of December 12, 2012]. Ministério da Saúde.
- Conselho Nacional de Saúde (2016). *Resolução n. 510, de 7 de abril de 2016* [Resolution No. 510 of April 7, 2016]. Ministério da Saúde.
- Cruz, A., Sales, C. M. D., Alves, P., & Moita, G. (2018). The core techniques of Morenian psychodrama: a systematic review of literature. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1263. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01263>
- Flückiger, C., Del Re, A. C., Wampold, B. E., Horvath, A. O., & Symonds, D. (2018). The alliance in adult psychotherapy: A meta-analytic synthesis. *Psychotherapy*, 55(4), 316-340. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pst0000172>
- Horvath, A. O., Del Re, A. C., Flückiger, C., & Symonds, D. (2011). Alliance in individual psychotherapy. *Psychotherapy*, 48(1), 9-16. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022186>
- Jung, C. G. (1968). *The archetypes and the collective unconscious* (2nd ed., R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). Princeton University Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1969). *The structure and dynamics of the psyche* (2nd ed., R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Kushnir, A., & Orkibi, H. (2021). Concretization as a mechanism of change in psychodrama: Procedures and benefits. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 633069. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.633069>
- Levitt, H. M., Bamberg, M., Creswell, J. W., Frost, D. M., Josselson, R., & Suárez-Orozco, C. (2018). Journal article reporting standards for qualitative primary, qualitative meta-analytic, and mixed methods research in psychology: The APA Publications and Communications Board task force report. *American Psychologist*, 73(1), 26-46. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000151>
- Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system. *Hypatia*, 22(1), 186-209. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb01156.x>
- Manrique, M. S., & Stefani, G. (2022). Psicodramatista em treinamento tornando-se um quíron: curandeiro ferido. *Revista Brasileira de Psicodrama*, 30, e0222. <https://doi.org/10.1590/psicodrama.v30.478>
- McLean, K. C., Pasupathi, M., & Pals, J. L. (2007). Selves creating stories creating selves: A process model of self-development. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 11(3), 262-278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868307301034>
- Moreno, J. L. (1946). *Psychodrama* (Vol. 1). Beacon House.
- Norcross, J. C., & Lambert, M. J. (2018). Psychotherapy relationships that work III. *Psychotherapy*, 55(4), 303-315. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pst0000193>

- Orkibi, H. (2021). Psychodrama: Creative adaptability: Conceptual framework, measurement, and outcomes in times of crisis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 588172. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.588172>
- Ovid (2004). *Metamorphoses* (C. Martin, Trans.). W. W. Norton.
- Richards, C., Bouman, W. P., Seal, L., Barker, M.-J., Nieder, T. O., & T'Sjoen, G. (2016). Non-binary or genderqueer genders. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 28(1), 95-102. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09540261.2015.1106446>
- Safran, J. D., Muran, J. C., & Eubanks-Carter, C. (2011). Repairing alliance ruptures. *Psychotherapy*, 48(1), 80-87. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022140>
- Schweitzer, L., & Kersbaumer, L. M. (2022). Masculinidades e psicodrama: contribuições da técnica do desdobramento do eu. *Revista Brasileira de Psicodrama*, 30, e0422. <https://doi.org/10.1590/psicodrama.v30.503>
- Testa, R. J., Habarth, J., Peta, J., Balsam, K. F., & Bockting, W. O. (2015). Development of the gender minority stress and resilience measure. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 2(1), 65-77. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000081>
- Tyminski, R. (2024). Humanizing different archetypal expressions of gender expansiveness. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 69(5), 809-826. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.13041>
- Winborn, M. (Ed.). (2014). *Shared realities: Participation mystique and beyond* (The Fisher King Review, Vol. 3). Fisher King Press.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. Tavistock Publications.