

Psychodrama 6: JAKE, Remembering Abuse.

Abandoned, Afflicted plots

He is a tall, lean, hollow-cheeked 43 year old transplant from West Virginia, whose accent hasn't diminished with the passing of the years. He'd sat through a number of psychodramas, began taking auxiliary roles, and finally he arrived today prepared to be protagonist on the abuse he suffered as a child. The group said *YES!*

1) When he was six, his mother rode in the front seat with a taxi driver while he and his brothers and sisters sat in the back. They asked where they were going but mother put them off. They stopped in front of a building. Mother didn't get out. The taxi driver delivered them to the door to someone who'd been waiting, and the taxi took mother off. No word of explanation! No goodbye!

2) In the shelter they found other children, little furniture and the stench of urine. They were locked in. After a while, a man appeared with a pot of hot cereal, which he threw to the floor, not caring that some splashed out. The children who'd been there dug in eagerly. Finally Jake's siblings joined in, but not Jake. He was insulted. When the other children had finished, he snatched the pot away from his siblings, *This stuff ain't fit for humans, and I wouldn't give it to the dogs.* When the man returned for the pot, he saw there was more food left than he'd expected to find, and blamed Jake that some didn't get their food.

3) Later that same night he picked Jake up and took him to another room. He stripped him, tied his hands over his head, and beat him unmercifully with a telephone wire. Jake refused to cry then, but now, silently, with the tears streaming down his face, he held his hands overhead to show us how he was tied up all night.

4) Finally the woman of the household found him, cut him down, and returned him to the room where the others were. He found his 12 year old sister crying. She too had been taken, raped and beaten. He vowed to kill the man someday.

5) On Sunday the place looked a bit better and the children were dressed in clean clothes for a real meal. This was visitors' day, and grandfather appeared, saw through the pretense and noted the odors they couldn't cover up. He raged at the caretakers, and took Jake and the others home with him for several years.

6) When housing in a project became possible mother finally reclaimed her children and took them to live with her there. Now a stepfather entered the picture. The scene took place at dinner. Jake had been tossing rocks and one broke a basement window. He pulled down Jake's pants and beat him with his belt.

7) Jake told us he had a family therapy coming up, and he wanted to keep himself under strict control. The psychodrama was his preparation. He plans to share these memories and wants to be able to get through them without *losing it*. He thought if he could unload in psychodrama he'd handle the family therapy better. I agreed.

8) For our final scene we did a projection of the way Jake hoped the family therapy would go. He'll ask mother: *Do I remind you of your father?* Clearly he felt he in no way deserved the abuse heaped upon him throughout his young life. He anticipated mother's saying *You were such a bad kid I was afraid of you. At six?*

Evenly Jake declared *I am not a bad kid*, reminding her of how much he'd been a caretaker of the other children, which they exploited without much appreciation. He told the group, though he'd not mentioned it in family therapy, how he went into crime to keep food on the table. He'd even had a shoot-out with drug dealers, which led to a prison sentence. The others got off. In prison he suffered sadistic sex abuse. Everyone present was deeply moved, and profoundly impressed at the self-control Jake showed, which avoided violence but let the tears come through.

Psychodrama 7: JEN 1, Low self-esteem.

Abandoned, Afflicted, Discover

Jen described herself as anxious and tense, because she is dealing with memories. She offered to be protagonist, to work on feelings of anger toward the little girl inside, and to move toward self-acceptance.

1) We began interviewing her in the reverse role position as a child of ten. She was wearing a T-shirt showing the Magic Mountain logo, and inquiry divulged this was a happy occasion for her. Her aunt and uncle brought her there. From time to time her parents yielded to her requests that she visit with them a week or so. She was way up high in the sky-ride with her aunt, who was not quite as brave as Jen. They seemed to be having almost as much fun in the enactment. She was all smiles. We learned that the parents took no interest in what she did while she was away, so she didn't share with them afterwards.

2) We staged a picture of herself at age twelve showing a bright white background, which made her nauseous. I asked what people called her then. Hoppi, she said.

D: *What's upsetting Hoppi?*

P: *I'm alone. My brother's mean. My parents are uninvolved.*

I noted that girls of twelve typically have one another as very close friends, and asked whether she did. She recalled a "Wendy," but even though they were close, she nevertheless didn't tell all. The protagonist thought her friend wouldn't understand, although she admitted that if the situation were reversed, her friend would've told her. I asked whether someone in the family was critical of her. She said her brother and her father were. I asked whether mother offered protection, but mother did not.

3) We explored her family relationships. I interviewed her in the reverse role position, and found mother felt her daughter deserved all she got. I asked her what happened when she appealed to mother for help. We set up a kitchen scene. The brother punched her repeatedly while mother stood by smoking a cigarette, and she failed to defend herself, keeping a 'stiff upper lip and taking it.' I asked whether anyone ever tried to restrain the brother. "No one," she replied.

4) We went beyond the actual event, making Jen her present age, and encouraging her, with the help of a double, to confront mother and brother for their having abused her as a child. She said, *I didn't deserve this. I felt you didn't love me.* I built on this by bringing the aunt into the situation. As the aunt, the protagonist confronted both brother and mother for their abusive, inappropriate and neglectful behavior. The aunt threatened to report any further abuse to the police, and warned mother that she'd be placed elsewhere in a home where people appreciated her.

5) There was a single instance, though an important one, where father stepped in forcibly. The protagonist had shut off the Atari TV on her brother in order to go to supper, but the brother reacted violently, taking her by the throat. Father rushed in, throwing the brother out of the way against the wall. He berated the brother saying,

If you want to beat on someone, try me. I'll kill you!

6) D: *Had you ever been able to do something in your own behalf?* This led to a scene in which she told her brother that if he didn't let up, she'd call the child abuse hot line and he'd go to jail. He never hit her after that. *I underscored her having taken charge of her life then, refusing to continue as his victim.*

7) Another instance of her having done something for herself, at least indirectly, came during the period she was placed in the House of the Good Shepherd for truancy. This was her way of coping with school phobia. I asked what she thought caused her phobia and she replied that it was all the people there she couldn't face. I cited the usual explanation of school phobia to see whether this might apply to her too, and she agreed that, yes, the family was falling apart, and she felt she had to be there to keep it together. But mother threatened to place her if she didn't go to school, so she refused to go to school! Thus she was taken out of the family situation, and when she returned, they didn't go back to their former behavior.

8) I placed her double before her and asked what words describe the child inside. *Sad, scared and empty,* she said.

D: How may we fill that emptiness? P: With love.

D: Who smiled at you back then? P: Mrs. Moore next door.

With the protagonist in the reverse role position as Mrs. Moore, we learned that the neighbor listened to her and talked freely with her on matters of interest to the child. Mrs. Moore provided cookies and milk for their conversation.

D: Is she still living? P: Yes, but she's sick.

9) This led to a current imaginary scene with Mrs. Moore, where the protagonist told her that she didn't want her to die, because she was so good.

Mrs. Moore: You were always like a granddaughter. I love you. They embraced.

10) I told the protagonist to consider the psychodrama she'd been through and speak to the little girl inside now.

The double came in as the little girl, and improvised: *Will you love me if I'm hurt or angry? P: Yes!*

Little girl inside: Will you help me now? P: Yes, I will..

We reversed so that she could be the little girl hearing the commitment. Then we brought the protagonist up to her present age. The double spoke of her love for the little girl, and specified 'what's good about the little girl inside her,'

With you I can have fun, be spontaneous, and not be so serious all the time. I'll take care of you and love you.

D: Show us what that means.

We concluded the scene with a hug.

Throughout the psychodrama Jen was in tears, her voice often so low one could hardly hear, but we echoed what she said so that her peers could follow everything. Her peers were emphatic

in their support of the little girl inside, underscoring her value, and the protagonist wore a smile as we closed the session.

The next example doesn't illustrate my point quite as clearly as the above, but it's from the same protagonist a week later and it shows the brother in his adult role. Besides, it contains surplus reality techniques to supplement the previous chapter.

Psychodrama 8: JEN 2. Brother and a Second Bride.

Deviated, Discover.

Jen told us that she was very anxious and scared. What she had on her mind were memories, and if protagonist she'd work on the upcoming visit from her brother two years older than her and his bride. She was ready.

1) The upcoming visit will be a family therapy with the social worker and the doctor present also. The brother is in the graduate school of education. They are dormitory residence counselors at the college. They matter a great deal to her, inasmuch as she has essentially written off the parents. The relationship with the sister-in-law is good; she is a friend, and the protagonist wants her there with the brother. We created an imaginary scene for the near future, which in anticipation the social worker gets the session underway, and then everyone focuses on the protagonist to hear the agenda she brings with her.

She was deeply involved, and could hardly talk. A volunteer amplified for the group to hear what she was saying. With the double's help we went into what was getting in the way of the protagonist's speaking freely. She was concerned that what she was about to say would destroy her brother's love for their parents, if he believed her, though she wasn't altogether sure he would.

I called attention to the presence of the doctor and the social worker, who quite evidently do believe her, and of the sister-in-law who'd not have the same obstacle to believing which the brother conceivably might. She was not able to look at her 'brother,' she was already in tears, staring at the floor, and crouched over in a fetal position.

Under maximum tension, she whispered They raped me. They asked for particulars: *It began when I was five and it happened till I left home in the 8th grade.*

Brother: *Why didn't you tell me?*

Jen: *How could I? You were only 2 years older than me.*

Brother was not totally surprised with regard to mother. They all knew that she was sick. But how could this be true of father, upon whom they had depended, when mother had proved so ineffectual? The protagonist's best guess was that he'd believe her after all.

She apologized for what this was going to do to his relationship with their father, and the brother replied he still loved his father but considered him a very sick man. Mother's sickness showed, but father had covered his up so well that the brother had never suspected what father had been doing with Jen.

2) Continuing the previous scene, I brought in an empty chair to represent father, and had her say directly to her father what she felt about him. She was able to tell him that she hated him for having betrayed her, for having taken away her childhood. She had depended on him to protect her and now she hated him. Mother may not have known what she was doing but father certainly did. She knew this from the way he tried to minimize the past, start over again...etc.

I put an auxiliary into father's chair, then reversed her with her brother, telling the-protagonist-as-the-brother to react to father. She fully believed brother was appalled with her father's behavior. I reversed her back to her own role to hear her brother say it to her. She touched her brother's hand:

I don't want you to hate father; I don't want to destroy this relationship for you.

Brother: *Maybe not, but it's not what I thought it was, I love you, and I'll deal with father at another time.*

The sister-in-law chimed in with her new husband and gave her wholehearted support as well. They were intent on making a healthy family for her. She took her place beside them, and they assured father that the next generation will not repeat the mistakes of the two previous. I let

father go, and concluded the scene with a three way hug.

3) We learned that she would have no contact with father, but that she had spoken over the phone with mother within the week. We enacted that scene. To warm the auxiliary up to the role, I did a role reversed interview with the protagonist as her mother. We learned that mother currently teaches third grade (!) and has been diagnosed as a multiple personality disorder. As teacher she is *Millie*, her most lucid self. But she has four personalities, which have emerged over the course of years of treatment.

This is how it seemed plausible that mother may not have remembered how horribly she had sexually abused Jen as a child. Mother herself had been sexually abused by the parent-figure of the previous generation. In the enactment of the phone call mother Millie said, *I know what you have been going through; I've been through it myself.*

We went beyond the scene as it happened to include what she might have said to mother if she'd been completely frank with her. *I know in your own sick way that you love me. I wish you weren't my mother. I know that you came from craziness, but it doesn't excuse what you did to me.*

We moved from beyond the actual phone call to an imaginary extension with face-to-face contact. Then I invited the brother and sister-in-law back to the stage, and they affirmed (as we'd done in the previous scene with father) that the next generation will be different from this one. The brother said, *It stops right here. We're not going to make the same mistakes you did, mother.*

P: Someday I will have a little girl and I will give her everything emotionally I didn't have. Turning to mother, *I wanted to love you but you just wouldn't let me.*

Mother: *I wish I could have. I feel that I've lost you.*

Jen nodded.

Mother added, *I'm sorry. I guess that's how things have to be.*

4) The concluding scene introduced Jen's unborn daughter, imaged at age five. She will be blond, blue-eyed, smiling, wearing a very pretty dress. I asked what the little girl was thinking about, and she indicated that she was thinking of going home. Our protagonist asked her what she wanted and the little girl said,

Dessert. Everyone laughed.

D: Tell Celia what life will be like for her the next few years.

P: I want you to be whatever you can. I want you to be happy.

The auxiliary as Celia: *I want to be like you, mommy.*

Protagonist's aside: *No, you don't.*

I reversed her into the little girl's role to receive the love and affection mother was giving her. The mother-figure said,

I want to give you a chance to be a little girl. I want you to feel safe and secure and to know how you're loved. We're not ever going to let anyone ever hurt you.

P as Celia: *I want to be like you, Mommy!* to which the auxiliary playfully replied, *You're going to have to take music lessons,* and the little girl said "O.K."

They embraced. Excellent sharing, some of which came from others who'd been sexually abused as well.

Chapter Four, A NEW DIRECTION TOWARD A SITUATIONAL SYSTEM

In psychology and psychiatry we take for granted that the world is made up of certain kinds of persons. So we have devised classification systems consisting of groups into which we assign persons whose distinctive characteristics fit them into one place rather than another. Persons within the same category are enough alike we make generalizations to help us anticipate how any member of the category is likely to behave. Let us assume we do this fairly well, so that if we were to repeat diagnosing at a later time, or if some other competent person were to do the

diagnosis, they would come up with much the same results.

But our experience with predicting what persons are likely to do has been very disappointing. We think we could improve our performance if we knew the specific situations persons face. That involves constructing types of situations. Indeed, social psychology has been defined as the effect of social stimulus situations on the individual.

Have you ever wondered to what extent knowing the situation improves the prediction? One way to answer this question is to measure accuracy of prediction in terms of the diagnostic category alone, and compare it with a measure of the accuracy of prediction in terms of the situation alone. With an analysis of variance design we can estimate the interaction effect at the same time.

This has been done, and we know that dissimilar persons are prone to behave in very similar ways in the face of the same situation. So if we attempt to make predictions on the basis of knowing only the diagnostic classification of the individual, we don't do well. Doesn't it make sense to shift our attention to the system which offers us more predictive power? The practical implication is this. If I want to know what a person is likely to do, knowing the situation in which he finds himself gives us a lot more to go on than simply knowing that person's 'diagnosis.' Therefore I've developed a system for classifying situations. See Tables 2 and 3, pages 65, 66, 67 below, and the appendices at the end.

Every situation calls for role performance, and sets parameters, but the roles taken in specific situations are hardly as cut and dried as we're led to believe. Observers identify particular roles, but participants may define them otherwise. Everyone in the scene is living out a story, but though stories overlap, they are not the same. What each brings to the scene and what each takes from it varies, but the variation is not chaotic. If we focus on one person there, whom we call the protagonist, we may find our way, and influence the outcome.

We're more interested in the role player than the role. Some chafe at their roles, and would break out of prison. Others hide behind their roles, to keep themselves 'safe,' and use their roles to sustain covert goals. Still others flaunt their roles, daring others to get in their way. They suppose others are just like they are.

After Moreno we offer a more sane and realistic view of role. Social roles are an end product of psychodramatic and psychosomatic roles. Developmentally, the psychosomatic role is there first, and out of interaction with persons present, one comes to develop a self. Exposed to those role-exemplars, the toddler expands to include them in role-play, exploring their range and possibilities, and goes beyond them in fantasy, bringing in the heroic and mythical figures the culture provides.

With maturing we encounter the more or less ready made social roles. There is social gain in taking them effectively, and we may temporarily sacrifice personal bent to attain a measure of competence and respect. With continuing role performance, however, we take possession of the role to more fully express who we are. We include, discard, and combine to create new roles out of the old, and in the eve of life define who we've been all along. Our therapeutic task is to facilitate the process.

What better model than the theater! There we replicate what has been happening in life, for art imitates life. Art is luxuriant source of imagery, and life reciprocates, imitating art. So I've turned to fiction, history, biography, religion, plays, TV, movies, folklore and even clinical notes for recurring patterns, and have constructed 28 plots to cover almost all situations. Each situation has its own family of roles, and moves in a definite direction, but unlike the stories listed above is open-ended, suddenly slipping from one plot into another, leaving us with little more than a theme (but the same system applies equally well to themes). Or within a plot itself we have role

reversals, in active and passive participation, sometimes within the individual alone, as in a soliloquy or monologue, but there is always a seen or unseen audience. Yet it seems as if no one has been in charge.

The 28 plot system uses verb names, almost all of which are transitive, as a short list of generic plots for psychodrama. Likewise, the generic roles required for these plots is quite small. Within the range of each plot, we may readily decide whether the protagonist typically takes the active or the passive role, and this of course calls for reciprocal antagonist roles, passive when the protagonist is active and active when the protagonist is passive. The list of generic roles we generate this way is limited to $28 \times 2 = 56$, manageable, and likely to fit most situations. We may begin compiling a role directory. See Table 3, page 66 below.

The Role Concept

The word 'role' comes from the French *rotula*, that is, a scroll which rolls and unrolls, like scripts for theater productions of a remote past. But roles have not been limited to those who stand before the footlights. You and I are engaged in roles -- daily! You may have heard someone speak of role-playing as if it were something bad-- sort of a con, something to hide behind in order to exploit the unwary. But we look at roles differently. We cannot not-play roles.

Consider your roles at home: have you parents or children there? Maybe a spouse or lover? Consider the place where you work: if you are not the boss, you're sure to have one, and colleagues whose tasks dovetail with yours. You've been to school, or maybe you're still going: This brings in teachers, secretaries, clerks, staff and students. Vacation season calls upon our playing the role of guest or host, traveller, gourmet, waiter or patron. At the market, we buy, sell, and window-shop.

Are any of these roles bad? No, although they can be done badly. Is taking a role like putting on a suit of clothes? We do dress up for some roles, such as police, soldier, nurse, clown -- or quite as predictably, in 'joining the Easter parade,' or putting on 'coat and tails' to receive awards. Characteristic dress signals anyone who needs to know what they may expect of us. Where uniformity is not required, the place where we're found, and the demeanor we show also provide presumptive bases for interacting with us.

Does the role disguise the self? Roles do much more than that. The role *presents the self*, and in those instances where the intent is to conceal more than to reveal, this too presents the self, perhaps in roles of salespersons, gracious hosts, international spies, or weary listeners. The role I take not only covers what I do, but proclaims who I am. Thus our roles involve us with one another. How could I play the roles I play without someone to play the opposite role with me?

Of course there are roles we may, if we choose, play alone, such as **physiological roles**, the role of the eater, sleeper, and--- is there an infant at home? Crier. But no infant ever survived those beginning physiological roles for very long without a caregiver at hand. Even a hermit requires a world which is willing to let him be. What about the role of homeless street person? Have we not taken the bystander role, reciprocating what they've been doing in standing by? One role makes the other possible.

Less obvious are the **psychodramatic roles** of life, unless we keep in tune with children, who need not cover-up their pretending. The little girl rocks and sings to her dolly without involving anyone else, unless she knows us well enough to invite us into her play, or to ask for an opinion.

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