

## TO FIND PERTINENT PROTAGONIST DATA CROSSING GENERATIONS

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Let's say that your protagonist is in psychodrama for the first time, with no advance information.

Some of what you need to know stands before you. You already have some impressions gleaned from the warmup. You're not totally at sea. The fact that the group chose him or chose her reflects their belief the protagonist is warmed up. After all, they're warmed up to the protagonist. Some affect predominates. It was on his face, in his voice, and manifest in posture.

Often the protagonist's choice of two words to describe himself today will reinforce other such clues. Our coarse sorting which is multiple choice among. See diagram and summary at the end.

ANXIOUS-FEARFUL, pointing to plots 2 through 7,

NEGATIVE-DEPRESSED, pointing to plots 8 through 13,

ANGRY, plots 14-18, MOBILIZED, plots 19-25,

and finally POSITIVE-HAPPY, plots 26 through 28 + 1.

Scan the likely possibilities---even before the protagonist has said much else. Nevertheless, what he has said has called forth a response from his peers. Experience with this particular group suggests some alternatives more than others. The parallel in a weekend professional workshop are these questions:

1. What brought you here?
2. What do you expect to get out of the workshop?
3. What are you prepared to do to make it happen?

Here is a window into a person's psychological mindedness, perhaps reflecting an expectation that the esteemed director will solve his problem for him. My goal is to place a share of the responsibility for success squarely on the protagonist's shoulders.

Psychodrama sessions do not occur in a vacuum. Community concern operates to prompt parents, others, maybe even the protagonist himself, to come to a treatment setting. Is the particular setting an outpatient clinic, or a group seen in private practice, or patients in a residential treatment facility? Selective factors guide the person to the place where he finds himself. Is this a school, a church, a social club, a prison, or psychiatric hospital? Also ethnic and racial groups. Each of these have their own usual clientele. Also what's going on in the world outside such as war or natural disaster? Consider the impact of 911 and the Kennedy assassinations on the USA.

Not that anyone can think of all this at the same time. Like a cop pounding his familiar beat, anything out of place claims his immediate attention. The person before you appears to be of a certain age---remember the life cycle with its times of transition, with one of three typical body structures---each with their personality characteristics and more likely pathologies, dressed in a way that belongs or doesn't belong to the situation we're in. Shaven clean or bewiskered and moustached? Hair short, long or missing? The name, if not the pigmentation, suggests ethnicity. The speech, free flowing, hesitant, accented---which accent? Also suggestive of mood, upbeat or depressed, urgent or relaxed? Do you hear a whine? Volume loud or low? Does the use of words betray an education or lack of it---perhaps a class identity? Note posture, how he deals with a chair, whether he stands close or farther away. Does he look at you as he speaks?

Is the protagonist open, relaxed and trusting, or closed, guarded and resistive? Is this due to his response to the director, or is it how he relates with his peers generally? Or is it simply his habitual stance in the face of authority---youth, age or gender? Does he need to be in control, or is he ever passive, waiting for direction? Some people never speak up, or take the initiative---and then complain later. If you touch an arm or an elbow, does the protagonist not notice, or pull away? Moreno nearly always held the hand of the protagonist, and that was accepted. But let someone else do it, and it may bring a raised eyebrow. What kind of director behavior is the group used to?

In public school situations such things are forbidden, or interpreted adversely. Gender or

attractiveness factor in. Does he require reassurance, raise questions, make side comments---witty, dismissive of others? Critical or accepting? Does he insist on his own way?

The same information is available to the group, on an intuitive level. You've discovered that some among them are natural doubles. Out the corner of your eye take into account their reaction to anything striking: sympathetic and invested, annoyed, skeptical or bored. Note whether they exchange glances with a peer and how this is reciprocated

How do you find yourself feeling as you deal with the protagonist? Annoyed? Inclined to nurture? Challenged? Is this to be a battle of wits, an old game to be played once more? Does the protagonist remind you of someone you know very well? Is this likely to be an exhilarating or an exhausting experience? Something apparently routine, so that mind wanders, and concentration takes effort? Or does caring fade?

#### HERE'S HOW ONE MAY FERRET OUT THE INTERGENERATIONAL DIMENSION

With whom is the protagonist paired? Same or opposite sex peer? Or which family member? Be careful not to make the decision for him? The empty auxiliary chair, placed center stage, is a usual approach. Ask "Who is the most important person in your life?" Answered, then say "Be [that person]. Sit in the chair as [he or she] sits. I am going to speak to you as if you are that person." Of course it's natural to begin with, "Do you know the protagonist? Tell me about [him or her]." Once in a while one mentions a dog or a cat, Jesus or God, a historical figure, or a current celebrity. The director plays along, asking the protagonist who in the group may represent this person? If he balks, I may ask for a volunteer or chose one for him. The protagonist in the role reversed position speaks God's message, or the words the dog would say if the dog could speak. I pull in another chair and find a double [which the protagonist may choose] or simply another auxiliary to represent the protagonist, for the sake of a dialogue. If you want to be fancy, you may ask for a scene setting, but if you do you may move from surplus reality to a scene from the past, which is OK but should be acknowledged. Be wary of wasting too much time.

Prompted for this or that bit of pertinent information, I listen for a reference to a third person. When the protagonist has returned to his own identity, I may interview him as I have with the first mentioned person. Or, for the sake of variety, I may make it more casual, having him take the role reversed position while standing, till I get what I'm looking for, to find out the one-to-one relationships within the threesome.

Does any one or two of the threesome belong to different generations? If all three are peers, this may not be a family matter---unless it is a sibling situation, where order of birth is an obvious factor. A very common finding among other peers is 'the eternal triangle,' maybe a full blown secretive affair---or not! Chances are that the other man or woman represent a family of origin figure---but that's another kind of psychodrama.

What I'm looking for is a cross-generation alliance at the expense of a parent's spouse, who is more distant to or in conflict within the marriage. If the spouse is not one of the threesome, where else is the spouse related? The spouse may be at the corner of another interlocking triangle. Unless we're going family therapy, this may take us too far afield. What matters to the psychodrama is, who has taken the place of the parent's spouse with the protagonist. Were there sufficient time, we'd take a look at the previous generation, and be sure to include persons no longer alive.

Psychodrama with a middle aged protagonist offers more ready opportunities to find cross generational relationships, for the parents are older, the grandparents still remembered, and the children are grown, with little ones of their own. A paper and pencil genogram, carefully done, would suggest several possibilities. We should note a chronology, for the timing of deaths, births and anniversaries, along with geographical moves, business failures, chronic illnesses, victims of violence, crime and natural disasters have their impact. Family secrets are more easily penetrated the more distant the source, for the protagonist suspects they do not affect him directly. As the construction of the genogram concludes the inquirer may say

"Every family connection has its black sheep, or injuries, such as rape, affairs or illegitimacy --- the soiled linen we don't show the public. In this confidential situation I hope you find it safe enough to let us know. It could be more significant for you or for other family members than you realize. Don't worry about what we may think. We don't pass judgment, like the doctor who examines your body. Privacy has its limits, and this may be one of them."

If it comes out in a psychodrama with strangers in the audience, it is easy to keep detail intact. Indeed, protagonists feel freer there than among friends and family.

Only the simplest genogram may be done on stage, perhaps on a pull up chart. A better way would be for the protagonist to do an action sociogram of the family, selecting and placing group members about the available space to represent each family member. The protagonist will slip in comments as he does this. The director may choose to say, "Speak to your grandfather, as if your peer here were you grandfather." Guard against doing this very often, for it takes a lot of time away from what you want to accomplish. The stated goal is to show how they all relate with one another. The protagonist may have spontaneously placed a chair centerstage (or elsewhere) for himself---may have even placed the double in it. The director allows without comment. But if he comes to the end of his arrangement without having indicated where he is in the midst of all this, the director asks for a chair or something (like a pillow) to represent the protagonist himself. Have the protagonist sit in the chair and look around at what he's done. Then role reverse with each family member in turn for reactions to his perceptions. At least at first---they choose the salient persons first, reverse the protagonist back to his own role to hear the auxiliary present to the protagonist what he's said as that person, so that we may take into account his reaction. This may lead quite naturally to the next step.

The director asks "Are there any changes you'd like to make, if that were possible?" If yes, have the protagonist alter his arrangement accordingly. One may do an abbreviated form of the procedure above. The director asks,

"What would be the next step for you to take to help make this happen? Let us assume you'll have a favorable response."

The director, by the power of imagination, takes the protagonist by increments into the future, whatever time span seems to be required to obtain the desired outcome. Then we play out the scene as the protagonist imagines it should be, if dreams come true.

How much time remains? We may conclude the action portion of the session at that point and be satisfied with the result, particularly if we have allowed, say, an off-stage scene in response to a clue to take us into a painful area inviting resolution. Catharsis, both abreactive and integrative may have already taken place or still be in progress

After the sharing we may include a discussion. The director may ask the protagonist what he learned about the family, and then bring in impressions from the group, if he's open to that. Finally, perhaps for future psychodramas, the director may mention the patterns noticed, get the protagonist's reaction, and then the group's reaction to the protagonist's reaction. The director may call for another scene, a postscript on what we've already done, to give the protagonist the chance to work through any emergent concern that can be disposed of promptly. Perhaps the director or someone else may spend some private time with the protagonist on this matter. A psychoanalyst may let a sensitive and unfinished matter drop till the next session, having decided in advance that patients be selected who are capable of putting themselves back together. In psychodrama we make no such assumption, for we do not select our protagonists in advance. We don't know their ego strength at the outset--or in family therapy terms, their level of differentiation.