

## The Play of Life, a case study on sexual boundary dysfunction.

### Functional Unit:

**Director:** Dr Carlos A Raimundo  
MD. Psychiatrist MBA Director of Psychodrama

**Auxiliary Ego:** Ms Alison Ashton-Jones  
SRN, SRM, Ba Couns; Dip in Psychodrama

The Play of Life has been developed by the author and derived from Psychodrama and Actions Methods created by J. L. Moreno (1889 -1974).

The Play of Life is a technique that utilises a small board, called a stage and small figures that are placed by the client (protagonist) on the stage to represent a specific life situation. Dynamic and interactive techniques (eg soliloquy, role reversal) are utilised to provide insight, clarity and understanding to the client about the situation analysed whilst also giving the therapist a visual language and thus independent information about the client. Through Relationship Mapping (sociometry) the protagonist (guided by the director) is able to observe at glance, simultaneously and three dimensionally relevant issues that are present and interacting in the situation the client is in. This mapping gives the therapist a wide perspective of the whole situation as well (role of social analyst).

After the present situation is interactively played and insights had derived from it, the director invites the protagonist to look to an ideal situation where healthy relationships are present. Such a mapping of a relationship and the type of interactions would bring health for the protagonist and people around them. Similar techniques are utilised in this instance to provide clear insight of the desired goal. We must mention that some people do not have a picture of healthy life. This technique is of extreme value as it allow the protagonist to “create” for first time for themselves a life worth living.

The most remarkable point in this technique is that the protagonist is now invited to look at what is the “First Step” they need to make towards that goal. This is the point of power, the action of change, the behaviour to acquire or develop in themselves. This is the most specific moment where the director plays the role of therapeutic guide using psychodramatic structure. The Psychodrama structure<sup>1</sup> has: 5 Instruments; director, auxiliary-ego, group, stage and protagonist. Three stages: Warm-up, demonstration and group sharing or Comments. Three Contexts; social, group and dramatic.

Roby (a fictitious name) is a 45 years old teacher who during his entire career has been sexually interfering with boys.

He is in a 6 month intense multidisciplinary psychotherapeutic program where mostly verbal counselling is utilised though it also includes Art Therapy and Psychodrama. During his therapy he has not been able to be in touch with his emotions, his stories are linear without any type of feelings, he’s detached and cold. He has a good recollection of data remembering well the incidents and facts but so detached from the situations that he can not see his participation in his stories.

### Warm-up.

Group; formed by 17 men and women looking at similar issues regarding sexual boundaries

**Warm-up;** is directed by the Auxiliary Ego who guides the group through body stretches and games to develop contact and boundary awareness. During the comments from the warm-up Roby share that he feels down. The director takes his comments and asks him to expand on it.

Director: Roby can you tell me more about “feeling down”.

Roby: I don’t know what else to say! But I feel slack, I believe this treatment is not helping me or it’s not for me!

<sup>1</sup> Psychodramatic Techniques. Active Learning Centre Sydney 1998. [learning@ozemail.com.au](mailto:learning@ozemail.com.au)

Director: Can you elaborate on that a bit more?  
 Roby: I know that I've done things that are not good but I need to look ahead.

**Demonstration**

The psychodrama director chooses to utilise the Play of Life technique. He places a small table in the middle of the room and ask Roby to sit at the table with the director sitting across in front of him. The director opens the Play of Life kit<sup>2</sup> and,

Director: Roby, we're going to look at your situation utilising the Play of Life.  
 Roby: That's good!  
 Director: Roby, can you describe for me a man that is fulfilled, satisfied and happy in life?  
 Roby: Yes, (with some coaching from the director) He is a 35 years old man, happy married with three children. They are a happy family. He has a stable job and has many friends.  
 Director: Roby, please depict this man and his family on the stage utilising the Play of Life figures on one side of the stage.

[As mentioned before, the director knows from the client and therapists that he has been talking about his inappropriate behaviour on many occasions without any emotions. The director does not want this to happen again therefore he's approaching the situation from a different angle. Instead of addressing his feelings or thought at the present he move him to a different scenario, where he has not visited before or not done so very often. The director starts with an ideal situation.]

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Director: Can you describe this person's life? For example; can you tell me how he feels regarding:

[The director writes on a whiteboard a list including:]

Life satisfaction	His own sexuality	Relating to the other sex	As father
As husband	As friend	Educating his children about life	About relationships
Trust	Sexuality	Addressing authority	
His relationship with authority	Spirituality	Facing difficulties	Self assurance
Enjoying life	Confronting adversity	etc	



The director asks if the man in the family represented on the stage enjoys or relates well to these points. He answers, " Yes" to all of them and the director writes a  in each box

Director: Roby, choose another figure, that would represent you, and place it on the other side of the stage facing the family.

[Roby places the figure as directed],

Director: Roby, how do you feel now that you created this family?

Roby: I feel very good, it looks nice and I create it. I'm not very creative you know.

<sup>2</sup> [www.playoflife.com](http://www.playoflife.com)

Director: you have done it very well.

[Roby is not down anymore, he's happy, chirpy and relaxed. The whole group is too they make short comments about the family that has been represented on the stage.]

Director: Roby, you have in front of you this family, a happy and successful man.

Roby: Yes, I like it!

Director: Roby, can you remind me what your profession is.

Roby: I've been a teacher for almost 20 years..

Director: How many children have passed throughout your classes?

Roby: I don't know hundreds of boys!

Director: Place a few figures, that could symbolically represent those boys, between you and the family you have created.

[Roby, places a few figures as directed and board is turned in a way that he sees the back of the figure that represents him and faces the family.]

Director: Roby, looking at those children [his students]. Do you believe that you have helped many of them, or you have contributed in your role as a teacher for them to develop as successful men as represented in the family you created?

Roby: Yes, I did.

Director: How does it make you feel?



Roby: Very satisfied.

[His face looks fresh and happy. He is relaxed. As he is not defensive, with his guards up, the director asks another question.]

Director: Roby, looking again to these children, do you believe that you have negatively influenced these children, that you have, in your role as teacher, interacted with them in a way that they would damage their possibility to achieve the goal of being a successful and happy man and father.

[His face changes and the whole group changes too. Roby looks down and the group looks straight to the director.]

Director: Roby, did you understand my question?

Roby: Yes I did (looking down)

Director: How many children have been affected by your interaction?

Roby: Dozens.

Director, Look at the children and leave as many children you wish to represent those children.

Roby: That's OK. I'll just leave all of them

[The director stands up and goes close to the whiteboard.]

Director: Roby, do you believe that with your interaction you had damaged these boy's ability to achieve life satisfaction and feeling good about their own sexuality?

[The director reads and names slowly each point placing a cross ☒ in each box on the whiteboard. Roby starts shaking, the group is now very uptight and looking at the director with defiant eyes. They later say they wanted to stop the process.]

By the end of the list Roby is shaking in an amazing way, like an epileptic fit. He throws himself to the floor continuing shaking. The director looks at him with attention and care but allows the process to develop. Roby becomes more stable and sat on the floor.]

Director: Roby do you have any ideology, any value system, any religion?

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Roby: Yes I have my ethical values.

Director: Roby come back to the chair. Choose a figure or a prop that could symbolise those ethical values and place it on the stage where you believe they may be in this moment.

[He chooses a figure and places it to his left looking at himself.]

Director: If these ethical values could talk, what are they saying?

Roby: You must die for what you have done!

Director: Do you believe this?

Roby; Yes I do! I deserve it! But I don't want to die.



[Roby starts crying uncontrollable like he hasn't cried for ages or has never cried. The director waits until he is more composed, the group is more relaxed as many are crying too.]

Director: Roby, what could you do not to die?

Roby: I must repent, I must ask forgiveness, I must change!

[The session continues with Roby asking forgiveness from his Ethical Values and from the children he abused. He is guided to do this slowly looking at the whiteboard and the children. This is for him to know what he is/was doing and not to just have a catharsis but a clear emotional and rational insight. He is able to look at the forgiveness he feels from his ethical values. The director makes it clear to the protagonist that it is appealing to know that he feels forgiven but that his process has to continue, or more than that it may just have started. The point made here by the director is to encourage each member of the group not to brush away or superficially appease their guilt without a thorough psycho-sociological process.]

This session made a dramatic change in Roby's therapeutic process.

### **Comments / sharing**

The group is very supportive of Roby. They share how angry they were with the director but understood that the process was needed. Few said that they wanted to stop for Roby but for themselves. They were surprised, some said tricked, to look at issues in a way they felt they were totally unprotected. The director assisted them in the comments to feel contained prior to the end of the session.

Roby is exhausted but grateful. He's guided to continue expressing what he found in his feelings in his art therapy session and to continue opening up those issues in his regular therapy. Ideally it would be good for Roby to continue with more session in psychodrama or the Play of Life to better imprint the process in his mind and heart.

\* For more information about psychodramatic techniques and other case studies utilising the Play of Life e-mail to: [enquiries@playoflife.com](mailto:enquiries@playoflife.com)

### **Bibliography**

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