

Brief Therapy With a Couple in “Alcoholic Transaction”: The Don Jackson Way

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Don Jackson was one of the founders of interactional brief therapy. The concepts and interventions Jackson developed and utilized are as relevant and useful today as they were 40 and 50 years ago, especially in this era of managed behavioral health care. One type of challenging clinical situation for brief therapists is a couple with relationship problems and one partner with addiction problems. This article discusses and illustrates many of Don Jackson's methods to interactional brief therapy with a couple presenting with these problems.

The therapeutic skill of Don Jackson is legendary. His approach to understanding human behavior derives from a unique personal genius for the incorporation, synthesis and operationalization of complex relational concepts. Jackson's innovative and uncompromising interactional orientation to therapy was informed by 4 years under the tutelage of Harry Stack Sullivan and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann during the mid and late 1940s followed by a 10-year collaboration with Gregory Bateson, Jay Haley, John Weakland, and William Fry in the Bateson research projects on paradoxes in communication processes at the Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital in Palo Alto, California.

Early on during their research, when the Bateson team began to study the communication patterns of VA patients diagnosed with schizophrenic, Jackson was brought into the project as a full-time consultant largely because of his considerable success in therapy with schizophrenics. This fortuitous event led to Jackson becoming the first clinical supervisor for Jay Haley, John Weakland, and William Fry, and later for Richard Fisch, Paul Watzlawick, and a number of other notable first generation family and brief therapists. Remembered as an incredibly gifted clinician (Fisch, 1988; Haley, 1988; Watzlawick, 1988; Weakland, 1988), Jackson is known to have been seeing patients in conjoint family therapy as early as 1951 when the complexities of a given case warranted involvement of other family members.

In the 24 years of his professional career (1944–1968) Jackson authored or coauthored more than 130 articles and book chapters, and seven books. He was awarded every major honor in the field of psychiatry, founded the family therapy institute, the Mental Research Institute (MRI), and cofounded with Jay Haley and Nathan Ackerman the first family thera-

py journal *Family Process*. Jackson and his colleagues created innumerable core premises of interactional or systemic family theory and therapy. More than 35 years after his untimely death, Jackson's interactional theory and conjoint model of family therapy continue to have a ubiquitous influence on virtually every interactionally oriented family and brief therapy approach, including the MRI model of brief therapy, Haley and Madanes' Strategic approach, the Milan Systemic model, and solution focused brief therapy. Recent years have seen the emergence of a number of other "language" oriented models—Goolishian and Anderson's Language Systems Approach, Michael White's narrative therapy, Tom Andersen's reflecting team, and Lynn Hoffman's noninstrumental orientation—all of which can be understood as extensions of the foundations laid down by Jackson and his colleagues. A comprehensive overview of Jackson's theory and technique of family therapy can be found elsewhere in the literature (see Greenberg, 1977; Ray, 1990, 1991, 1995, 2000).

The purpose of this article is to illustrate some of the seminal interactional therapy interventions that Jackson developed in his clinical work. This article will focus on a particular series of interventions Jackson used to promote change with a couple who initiated therapy because of the husband's self-described alcoholism. The clinical work took place in early 1967 at the Brief Therapy Center, which Richard Fisch, John Weakland, and Paul Watzlawick had been formed earlier that year at the MRI. When the Brief Therapy Center (BTC) research project began, a routine aspect of the program involved inviting Master therapists to demonstrate their therapy technique as a guest therapist. As the Director of the MRI, Jackson was among the first therapists invited to participate in the project specifically designed to investigate efficient and effective methods of treatment. Jackson had already been experimenting with brief therapy (Jackson, 1959, 1961, 1962, 1963/2000) before the creation of the Brief Therapy Center, largely as a consequence of his close working relationship with Jay Haley and John Weakland (Jackson, 1962). The client discussed in this paper was the fourth case seen at the Brief Therapy Center and the only client Jackson ever saw under the auspices of the BTC. While this case is over 35 years old, it is as important today as it was then. Trends come and go, but good theory and technique are timeless.

INTERACTIONAL BRIEF THERAPY WITH THE SMITHS

In February 1967, Doug Smith, a 45-year-old college graduate and U.S. Army Veteran, contacted the Brief Therapy Center at the Mental Research Institute and requested therapy. The initial interview was conducted as a home visit by Don Jackson, who was to be the primary therapist in the case, and Richard Fisch, Director of BTC. Jackson routinely made home visits because he found them useful for seeing what the client's home environment was like. It is interesting to note that this modality was rediscovered in the 90s as home-based family therapy. All subsequent interviews occurred at the Brief Therapy Center.

Doug complained of debilitating headaches, low productivity in his work as a salesman, and severe marital discord with Linda, his wife of 19 years. Linda believed most of the couple's difficulties were the result of Doug's problem drinking and Doug agreed. The couple had four children, Doug Jr., age 15, Jill, age 13, Jack, age 11, and Sandy, age 9. The children were doing well and were not the focus of treatment. The family had moved to California from another state 12 years earlier subsequent to a job offer for Doug. A successful salesman, Doug and family had enjoyed a high standard of living until the previous 2 years during which Doug's income had declined due in part to two job changes. Linda was a full-time homemaker and had not worked outside of the home during her marriage. Presented below is the fourth interview with Doug and Linda. Given the way the case evolves, I have elected to present the conceptualization as the session unfolds.

"Well, I didn't know that you'd be able to come this morning," Jackson said to Linda.

"Me?," responded Linda in a tone of voice that suggested she saw herself as somewhat of a victim.

Comment

Jackson had observed this to be typical of Linda's behavior toward Doug—her part of what had become the preduring pattern of interaction with her husband. By now, Jackson was quite familiar with this *transactional redundancy*. He decided to "tamper" (Jackson & Yalom, 1965) with it during this session in order to evoke change.

"Yeah," said Jackson. "I talked to Doug on the phone and . . ."

"Well," Doug said turning toward Linda, "I didn't think you might want to."

"Oh," said Linda in a puzzled voice.

"You hadn't expressed that?" Jackson inquired.

"No," said Linda.

"I think good old Doug may have been trying to protect you again," Jackson said, commenting wryly on the couple's relationship.

Comment

In previous interviews Jackson had successfully framed Doug's "symptom behavior" [drinking, involvement with another woman, and other "undesirable" behavior] as functioning to protect Linda. Connecting the problem behavior of one person with the surrounding behavior of the other spouse was Jackson's way of making explicit the quid pro quo quality of such interactional redundancies (Jackson, 1965a & b).

"I don't know," said Doug, "She doesn't think I was trying to protect her at all."

Jackson turned to Linda. "You think he's been a bit of a bastard lately?"

"Uh-huh. Especially lately."

Comment

Two premises are central to Jackson's model which have carried over into contemporary strategic therapy: (a) One cannot not communicate; and (b) People are constantly attempting to define the nature of their relationships. Keeping these two premises in mind helps to make sense of Jackson's utterances. Jackson was renowned for quickly detecting the interpersonal implications of one family member's utterance and making it explicit by commenting on it in the moment—and in doing so, making the covert meaning overt.

"Oh?," Jackson continued. "Any particular time in the last couple of weeks or months or . . . several days especially?"

Comment

Jackson was seeking descriptions of sequences of interaction—who is doing what to whom, where, when, and in what way is it a problem. Not only does Jackson listen to what the client says (content), more importantly he is observing how the wife says what she says and watching how the husband reacts. What is relevant to this model is tracking how the behavior of

one spouse influences and restricts the actions/utterances of the other. Fleshing out these patterns of interaction in which problem behavior is embedded is an essential aspect of Jackson's model of therapy.

"Uh, well," Linda sighed, "he had his day off. So we went out, for the first time, down to Joe's."

Comment

Doug immediately qualifies Linda's utterance.

"We went up, and we had a few drinks at her house, and I got in my car, and I went over and talked to some people, and I got loaded and I wound up over at a place which has caused a big rift between us. Every time I take a drink, not every time I take a drink, but and I was in the car, and it was close, and I went over there. There was nothing between the woman and myself sexually—it was just a friendship. But I've known her for years, and nobody would ever believe it, but that's the way it is."

"Yeah. He stayed there all night," said Linda in a hurt and accusing tone.

"That was five . . . six years ago, Linda," said Doug.

"Two years ago, Doug," Linda retorted in an accusing tone of voice. "Apparently, she's moved in the meantime recently, and he sure knew the phone number and the address right away. He didn't have to look it up."

"Well, I thought some really serious things had been happening," Jackson said.

Linda let out a gasp.

Comment

This seemingly rude and dismissive comment by Jackson was an intentional method of commenting on the unproductive nature of this exchange, and at the same time, interrupting it. Jackson's comment blocks the client's attempt to initiate a repetition of a typical *problem-maintaining interaction* which perpetuates the very difficulties being complained of. In this instance the pattern involves Linda implying that Doug is involved with another woman, which he then denies, followed by more accusations and expressions of hurt by Linda, which, predictably, is responded to by Doug with more denial and anger, in a vicious cycle that leads nowhere. Jackson's comment is intended to *make overt* the repetitive and unproductive nature of the exchange.

Jackson continued "One of the serious things that's been happening is that you've gotten drunk a couple of times."

"That's probably the most serious thing, Dr. Jackson," said Doug in a self-blaming tone. "I shouldn't drink."

"It's the drinking and the other women," Linda added.

"It's impossible," Doug continued. "My behavior is that way when I drink, that's all."

"Um hm," said Jackson. "You sound pretty assertive when you drink, the few times you've called me." [Doug had phoned Jackson on several occasions under the influence of alcohol.]

"Yeah," Doug confirmed. "It builds up my ego, or something, and then I lose it again."

Jackson paused for a moment. "Well, I wonder if you could do that sometimes without drinking?"

"Beg your pardon?" said Doug, feigning misunderstanding of Jackson's query.

Comment

One of the most important aspects of Jackson's interactional theory and his incredible ability to pick up on and utilize the interpersonal implications of behavior in the immediate moment, was his conviction that many manifestations of behavior which appear innocuous can accurately be understood as behavioral ploys which are being used for the purpose of avoiding explicit comment on the nature of the relationship, while simultaneously disqualifying the other at an implicit level. In addition to "misunderstanding," other interactional maneuvers commonly used to avoid making unambiguous statements about the nature of a relationship include "self-contradiction, inconsistencies, subject switches, tangentializations, incomplete sentences" (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967, pp. 76).

One of Jackson's fundamental working premises was the idea that absolutely nothing is wrong with the symptom bearer. His behavior is *adaptive to the context and relationship nexus* of which he is a part. Further, when interaction is approached from the perspective that participants are attempting to define the nature of the relationship, then all behavior, including pretending not to understand a clearly stated utterance by the therapist, may be understood as an effort to organize the interaction. In this case, Doug was avoiding the uncomfortable interpersonal consequences that could arise if he, in this instance, understood that Jackson is proposing he could handle his wife differently while sober.

Jackson stuck with his inquiry "You know?"

"Yeah," Doug admitted.

"Because you sound pretty good, you know, like I'm not going to take any shit off of anybody," Jackson continued, "Not nasty, but just firm."

"Yeah," Doug confirmed.

"But of course, sometimes, you can go too far," Jackson added.

"Then he gets so much worse," interjected Linda. "And he phones - these long distance phone calls, leaves his calling card everywhere, and he will phone long distance and talk..."

"I haven't been doing that lately," Doug said defensively.

"Well, I haven't got time for your personal differences," Jackson said, again interrupting this repetition of the couple's standard pattern of interaction. "You've got plenty of time to fight at home. Uh, how does drinking make you feel?"

"I've got so much nerves," Linda replied following Jackson's redirection of the discussion.

"I'm so full of them, and drinking is the only thing that apparently relaxes me. My heart's going like mad, and I get frightened, and I can't get my breath and my high blood pressure is going to 240, and it's just fear and nerves, and I'm just so full of it in these last two days and I can't sleep. With him, and the way he's acting, and I don't think it's really worth it. I just wish he'd sort of go down to this woman he seems to want and get out of my life. And I think that once he did, I could really start getting a grip on myself, I've been through too much with him. I don't go out. I haven't been out in five years."

Jackson refused to be distracted. "How does drinking make you feel?" he repeated.

"Me?" Linda responded innocently, "It just relaxes me. For the time being, I don't worry. I don't drink to excess, I never have and I never will, so help me God. My doctor said, 'We can't recommend it,' but, I had been so bad, he said 'just take a good shot' and I've done it rather than take the Phenobarbital and other drugs that I have used before, and I've found that this has helped me, and it just calmed me down. When was it—last Sunday? It started up again, and mother ran across the street and got that much [liquor] from a neighbor, we didn't have any, and all of a sudden, I just calmed down. But that's the whole thing—it's just him—I don't know. Doug just triggers off everything," Linda was now crying, her vocal tone was desperate and helpless.

Comment

Jackson (1967a) noted that couples in alcoholic transaction interact in a very restricted manner and the "alcohol bouts" are one aspect of this dance. The content of the disputes may differ—Doug's drinking, his going to see another women, Linda's having a recurrence of her physical ailments, or some petty disagreement—but the sequence of their transaction was patterned and predictable. Just about anything Doug or Linda did to stop the drinking inadvertently perpetuated it. Once Jackson recognized the *redundancy*, he was often able to interrupt it, rather than allowing the couple to go on "venting" their dissatisfactions. Jackson now began to set the stage for one of the primary interventions in this case: Making Linda discuss why she stays with Doug.

"Why does he do this to you?" Jackson asked.

"I don't know," Linda responded. "We were in the store getting shoes—just for an example—this is the day off again, and the man said, 'What's the name?' and he said, 'Doug Smith' and he was looking around and the man said, 'The address?' and I just told him '777 Bryant Street' and I got screamed at when I got outside. That started our day, I don't know what was so wrong with telling him the address, but apparently I shouldn't have done it. He should have done it."

"She acts like my mother too much," said Doug in an irritated tone.

"Oh, God!" Linda sighed, "Please, Doug."

"Well," Doug snorted in response.

Jackson continued "Well, what was the matter with . . ."

"I'm nothing like his mother," Linda interrupted. She paused to catch up to Jackson's question. "Pardon?"

"What was the matter with that statement?" repeated Jackson.

"Well, his mother is a very domineering woman," Linda explained, "I mean, she's just a little beyond . . ."

"Well, instead of saying, 'I'm not like your mother,' you say, 'Oh my God! Please Doug.' Why is that?" Jackson wanted Linda to make overt the meaning embedded in how she said what she said.

"Because I'm not like his mother," Linda stated firmly, "Because I don't know how he's even lived through his mother."

"Oh." Jackson said with an innocent tone.

"She's had the three boys, she's never loved them," Linda continued. "She's just continually hammered at them from the day they were born and her husband left her, and she's bitter. She is the most difficult woman I've ever met. You can't get to her. There's a mental block and she just won't listen and she just — the minute he walks in the door, she's at him, you know."

"Umm," said Jackson, "Where does your mother live, Doug? I forget."

"In Portland, now," Doug replied.

"Oh yeah. So you don't have to see too much of her?"

"No," said Linda.

"I can't," Doug added, "It shoots me off. I can't have her around our home more than a couple of hours, because it hurts."

"He has a very big guilt complex about it too," said Linda, attempting to explain Doug's comments.

"My brother is the same way," Doug said.

"You do act a little like his mother, don't you?" Jackson said, supporting Doug.

"Pardon?," said Linda.

"You do act a little like his mother, don't you?"

"No. No!" Linda shot back.

"You were just talking for him," Jackson went on. "He was telling me what his mother was like, and you were telling me what his mother is like."

"Exactly!" Doug exclaimed, "This is what happens." Doug began to laugh out loud as he describes an illustrative incident in a shoe store.

"I'm sorry," Linda said, recognizing the story and the implications of giving answers for her husband. She quickly pulled back.

"There's nothing to be sorry about," Jackson said, softening his tone. "But we might as well put it on the table."

"How can you stand to be helpful to somebody," said Jackson, "who's giving you such a pain in the neck?"

Comment

Jackson (1967b) has said that the task of therapy is for the therapist to comprehend the pattern of interaction in which the symptom is embedded, then to behave in such a way with the clients that the pattern must change, making the symptom no longer necessary. His comment represented just such a strategy.

"I guess it's the children, replied Linda. "I've stuck by him because of them. . . ."

"My daughter told me last night that I was the nicest father that existed in the world," Doug interrupted. "She said she wouldn't trade me for anything, even though I drink. I told her, 'Now you couldn't have said anything nicer to me. That makes my whole life a whole lot more worthwhile. That evens the till.'"

Comment

Having observed the couple's repeated escalating symmetrical exchanges, Jackson synthesized their patterns into a question designed to influence them toward change.

"Now the two of you are in a real great competition to prove who has done the worst to whom, you know?" he asked. "I mean, who's got the more nail holes in the palm? And this, of course, is a losing battle for both parties. You just keep going down and down and down. Uh, do you ever get together on anything?"

"Yeah," said Doug.

"You do? What?"

"I think genuinely, we're very much attached to one another," Doug said amplifying his response. "After all, we've lived together for 19 years, and I think that we're just trying to knock each other off, like you say, we're having a battle. And instead of helping one another, we're hindering one another. But deep down, we don't really mean to do it. I don't think we really do. I think we should get along better, but I don't know. Maybe it's impossible for us to get back together, and uh, if we're going to live another 5, 2, or 1 year, or whatever it is, maybe we should separate, and maybe it's meant that way. We've just come to a stage where we're not ever going to be able to get along. I've caused the greatest portion of the problems, I realize that. I take a drink and then I do irrational things. That's what usually starts it."

"I haven't been out with him in 5 years," Linda said, supporting her husband's willingness to take the blame.

This was apparently too much for Doug. "Now listen, that statement is not correct."

"Well, I haven't," Linda reasserted.

"We went to '[Who's Afraid of] Virginia Woolf,' it was 2 years ago," Doug argued. "And we had front, center seats, I had the tickets."

"Now you just interrupted her chance to be a martyr." Jackson said, assuming what he had just seen to be typical of their pattern of interaction. "Now you don't want to do that, do you?"

"Doug got two tickets given to him, it was just before I went into the hospital." Linda continued without acknowledging Jackson. Her voice was now desperate and tearful. "And it got to the third act, and I just couldn't . . . I said, 'I just have to go to bed.' And I was nearly dead with bleeding, and he's never forgiven me for not seeing the third act. But I couldn't even see it, I was so weak, and it was just two weeks later that I was in the hospital and the doctor said, 'I don't know how you ever came through it, you've lost so much blood'."

"I'll say one thing," Jackson responded, "I thought Doug was pretty tough to deal with, but I can see that both of you are pretty good. He gets . . . he's tough to deal with because he gets this kind of a 'set' and he doesn't hear too much, you know? But, boy!"

"Would you get angry with your wife because she couldn't sit out the last act of 'Virginia Woolf' because she was nearly dead?" Linda retorted.

"I'm not going to fall for that one," said Jackson, avoiding Linda's effort to get him to align with her side in her argument with Doug. "I just wanted to say that I can see that you're a match for each other. Now, is there any way that this vitriolic kind of one-downmanship you play with each other, you know, can be turned into anything else? Do you ever do anything that's constructive together? Do you handle the children in a certain way, back each other up? Or do you ever enjoy sex together? Or anything?"

After a brief pause, Doug asked "You talking to me?"

"Well, either of you. Is there anything you do, that involves working together, even for a few minutes."

"I think we like each other," Doug answered vaguely.

"I mean, is there anything you do?"

"I think sexually, we've been passable," said Doug. "I don't think that we've really tried hard, or taken enough interest in sex."

"Doug is a rape artist," Linda said accusingly.

Doug laughed uncomfortably.

"He just says, 'How about it?' There's no love at all. 'How about it?' and he climbs on and that's it in two minutes."

"Are you out for some kind of prize?" Jackson asks Linda, pushing the issue to the point of absurdity.

"No," said Linda, "I'm not."

"Because I haven't heard a story like this from anybody in a long time. What you've put up with is fantastic. He beats you, he rapes you, he gets drunk on you, he chases other women, he fails to support you in the manner in which you have become accustomed. He lets you bleed to death in the movie. Why do you put up with this?" Jackson paused, letting his words sink in. "I mean you can tell me it's all the kids, you know, but I can't buy that, because it's bad for them to see you. If you're happier by yourself you could be happier and do more for them."

"She's a very dependent person," Doug said. "She doesn't know how to go out and make a buck for herself."

"It's like being dependent on a cobra, you know?" Jackson rejoins. "What kind of dependence is that?"

"Yeah," Doug said. "That's right."

Jackson turned to Linda. "Is there anything about Doug worth saving?"

"Boy," Doug laughed sarcastically. "I've certainly been called a lot of names, since I've been here. I eat shit, and now I'm a snake. I guess that's true."

"The only thing I can say is maybe another woman would be the one. Maybe I'm just not the type for you Doug. Cause I don't have . . ."

"Your mother thinks that we should separate," Doug interrupted.

"No. Never mind my mother."

"Why is that?" asked Jackson.

"It's just that some women are sex pots and they just feel good about anything," Linda said.

Comment

This was yet another example of the couple's tendency to not complete communicative transactions.

Jackson decided to push for an answer to his question, "Why shouldn't he mind your mother?"

"Well, it's just bringing another party in. She thinks that the way he talks to me, she's never been one to like it, and she gets upset about that."

"It's true," Doug added.

Jackson tried again: "Well, why do you think you put up with it? Simply because you felt too badly to uh//"

"I don't know," Linda said. "I just feel insecure myself, I guess, about facing the world again, and about what I'm going to do about the children, and he could go right into the gutter with this drinking because he said, 'I'll never quit' and I thought, 'that's all I need,' and how can I support them. I guess I'm thinking this way more, because I don't think I could. I didn't quite finish high school and I'm not young any more."

"You wouldn't have to worry about supporting the children," Doug said.

"I would if you were gone. I never finished high school, and I'm not young anymore."

"Has Mom got any money?" asked Jackson.

"No. She just has a house, but it's a roof. But I could, if I was alone, I guess I could do babysitting, or something. I don't know. I didn't finish high school. I was just in my last year and I got a terrific job offered me, and not long ago school didn't seem important to a woman, so I took it. So imagine now, a woman at my age, and not even that, going out into the world. I'm not a business woman anyway, I hate it. I loathe it."

"Yeah, but can you afford to suffer the way you've been?" Jackson's voice showed an obvious concern.

"Well, my physician said that if I didn't get away, I'd be in the hospital, because I've had such nerves. And I'm very much at fault, because Doug didn't come home, he'd come home a few times at eleven and I was in bed, but it still started over this sickness. I was never really that bad. He started drinking in Oakland. . . ."

"You were drinking along with me," Doug interrupted.

"Yes. I had a drink with you, Doug, but I never . . ."

"You gulped them down just as fast as I did," Doug said, laughing uncomfortably. "In fact, we were fighting to make it to the last drop of the half-pint."

"This was in Oakland," Linda explained. "We'd just moved down, he gets the half-pint . . . I'm going back 12 years. . . ."

"You're not bad on dates yourself, kid," chided Jackson.

"I know," Linda said. "Oh, I have. I'll admit this."

"The two of you in court, you know, could keep a couple of lawyers busy for many thousands of dollars worth apiece."

Comment

Jackson was again assuming these arguments and accusations to be indicative of an ongoing pattern, rather than a real movement toward dissolution of the marriage.

Linda continued, "Well, I've never been like Doug, and I always had control."

"I don't think so," replied Doug. "You haven't had control to the point of where you just let your housework go to pot."

"I just haven't cared anymore, Doug, really," Linda responded.

"You haven't cared for quite some time," Doug said.

"I guess it's all a game," Linda said, her frustration becoming increasingly apparent. "This

probably sounds very petty and stupid, but when I saw so much money going with the blond [the other woman], and when I got home from the hospital, I said, 'Doug, don't send flowers.' I said, 'Just get a woman to clean.' Because this thing had just about killed me and I was just dragging, blood everywhere. That's all I asked for."

"You dragged for 4 years without doing anything about it." Doug said angrily. "I should have kept the cover that you put over the mattress. You dragged, and I tried to get you to go to the doctor and you were scared to go, and . . ."

"Alright!," Linda said angrily.

"Now wait a minute," Jackson said, interrupting Doug. "She's in the middle of bleeding for 4 years..."

"It was 1 year," Linda said.

"Oh," Jackson said. "I heard 4, but . . ."

"It was," asserted Doug.

"It was about 1," Linda said. "Anyway, I just said, 'Doug, the only thing I ask is get someone in here, call the janitor service, they can come just once to go over the place thoroughly.'"

"The children and I cleaned the house up," Doug retorted.

"And it was just simply filthy . . ."

"It was not," Doug argued.

Comment

Jackson sensed he needed to intervene in a way that would utilize this negative pattern of interaction, and set the stage for exploring the disadvantages for Linda should Doug's symptomatic behavior improve.

"Now see, there's one thing that you haven't given him credit for," Jackson said in a curiosity evocative tone.

"What?" asked Linda inquisitively.

"Perhaps because you never thought of it," continued Jackson.

"What?" Linda repeated.

"And is that the only way that he can make you a martyr and get you to really feel the role, is by misbehaving." Jackson asked. "How else could it be done? He does this sort of thing, and then you feel abused and understandably so, but you're back in that role, you see? If he should improve, good God, what would happen to you?"

"Well, I'd have to lose 30 pounds, because he never would look at me the way I am."

"Yeah," Jackson said with great empathy, "losing 30 pounds is tough . . . and . . ."

"And," continued Linda, "he says no other man would either. Yeah, it's very tough when you're full of nerves."

"It's tough in any circumstances," replied Jackson. "What else would you have to do if Doug improved?"

After a pause, Linda said "Oh, I'd have to smarten up with the house, that's for sure. I'd at least have to have a kind word or something when he comes home without taking off and getting drunk."

"Well now, if Doug improved, you'd have to lose quite a bit of weight."

"Yeah."

"And, you'd have to work harder around the house."

"Yes."

"What else would you have to do?"

"I don't know. Is there anything else?"

"What about your relationship with your mother? Do you think you'd have to change that too?" Jackson asked.

"No . . . I don't know . . . my mother, she's just there, and she comes up to see us, that's all. My husband is crazy about my mother, in fact, that's the one he should have married. Probably he would have been happy with her. In fact he wants my mother to come and live with us."

"Well," Doug said in a condescending tone, "I can't understand how anyone who can be so well adjusted to life can have a daughter like you."

Comment

Jackson had prevented the couple from their routine of exchanging cutting remarks by focusing them on the changes Linda will face when Doug's problem behavior improves, but they had found their way back to these familiar patterns. He now moved to *make overt the covert* connection between Linda's somatic illness and the tug of war in which the couple was stuck.

"Well, would you not also have to be not as sickly as you have been?"

"Pardon me?" Linda asked.

"Wouldn't you also have to be less sickly . . . apparently?"

"Oh, yes," acknowledged Linda, "Oh, yes, because all of this is just continual effort . . ."

"But that's also an effort, you know," said Jackson. "Because if one doesn't have some kind of sickness he can use, then he won't have any excuse for anything. It's difficult. You can't say, 'Why, I didn't mean that. I don't feel well.'"

"That's true."

"Your whole life would have to be rearranged," Jackson continued.

"That's right," confirmed Linda.

Comment

As the interview neared its conclusion, Jackson decided to summarize the situation, then prescribe the continuation of the couple's pattern, in which the behavior of each spouse is aimed at forcing the other to change, but the effect of which is perpetuation of the problem. He does this, adding a slight twist, as a way to evoke change.

"Well, it occurs to me that two people who dislike each other so much . . . that you have real potential, because you haven't managed to agree on a single thing since you've been here, which is pretty good. That takes some doing. Some people agree by accident. Suppose that you were to continue to nag Doug and complain, either about your health, or about other women, or about there not being enough money, in order to keep him on his toes. And in return, to get back at you, he stopped drinking and stops seeing other women so that you wouldn't have any cause to nag him, which would make you look kind of foolish. Now that would be the kind of arrangement where you, Doug, could do the same kind of thing that you're doing now only it would be a hell of a lot more useful. I think you dislike your wife enough to quit drinking in order to fix it. What a lovely, superior feeling you could have for a change."

"I don't dislike her," said Doug in an oppositional voice.

"I didn't say that you only dislike her," Jackson responded, "We all have mixed feelings."

"Well, that's right," Doug agreed.

EPILOGUE

The Smith's were seen a total of nine times, with Jackson as therapist in eight of the interviews. At that time at the Brief Therapy Center, each family member was asked to complete an extensive written questionnaire and return it by mail, at 3 and 6 months after termination as a way of tracking therapy outcome. These reports indicate the couple was still together.

Linda, her mother, and the children all reported that the relationship between Linda and Doug was much improved, and while Doug continued to drink, his alcohol intake was markedly reduced. There was no report of continued involvement with the other woman. Doug's response was consistent with the others, although much less forthcoming.

One of the most impressive characteristics of Jackson's therapeutic ability demonstrated throughout this interview was his ability to maintain an acute focus on the interpersonal ramifications of the exchanges taking place between family members and with himself in the present moment. Also remarkable was his ability to apprehend the nuances of meaning conveyed by the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the clients, and to use his own verbal and nonverbal behavior and rhetorical skills in framing these complex relationship dynamics in ways that carry implicit and explicit meaning at a number of levels of abstraction simultaneously.

Weakland (1988), Haley (personal communication), and others have commented that Jackson's hypnotic skill, particularly when working with a couple or family, was stylistically different but qualitatively comparable to Milton Erickson. Most of the technical nuances of Jackson's conversation with a client, however, cannot be adequately appreciated without hearing the incredible range and variation of inflection, tone, and control over his presentation of self. These multiple aspects of communication do not evidence themselves in mere words—Jackson's ability to manage a complex interaction with this couple, his shift from nonsense refusal to allow the client to digress, followed by a gentle, empathic understanding. His use of voice inflection, timing, and vocal gate to create a context in which the clients had to change their typical pattern of interaction was striking. Once the pattern of interaction changed in a preduring way, the symptomatic behavior began to show observable improvement and therapy was complete. The perceptive acuity Jackson displays in this conversation, as extraordinary as it is, is typical and representative of his style of therapy. Being able to use Jackson's own interactional theory to comprehend the nuances of his capability to grasp the interpersonal implications of interactional exchanges, and convey meaning on a number of levels of communication simultaneously, is essential to understanding his uncanny ability to work successfully with complex cases.

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