Using Theater Improvisation to Assess Interpersonal Functioning

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ABSTRACT. Theater improvisation games and exercises, which employ role-playing methods, are structured tasks useful for the assessment, training, and remediation of interpersonal skills. Using case material, the author demonstrates how those tasks reveal distinct deficiencies or imbalances that are manifest in clients' psychosocial functioning and describes 5 theatrical functions necessary for adequate psychosocial functioning as part of a dramaturgic model.

ATTEMPTS TO ASSESS THE ADEQUACY of clients' psychosocial functioning by psychometric testing omit much of the realistic, global, and immediate context of social behavior. According to Moreno (1934), such testing permits only the analysis of "cold material which the subject leaves behind after his excitement in the state of production has passed" (p. 122). Consequently, some researchers and therapists simulate social situations that call for subjects to improvise their responses. In Moreno's (1934) original Spontaneity test and in later situation tests (Starr, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Newcomb, 1948), clients were instructed to behave naturally in an unforeseen situation that was staged by the experimenter. The Psychodramatic Role Test (Kreitler & Kreitler, 1964) required solitary clients to improvise responses to realistic situations described by off-stage voices, whereas the Projective and Expressive Action Test (Del Torto & Corneytz, 1944) employed scenarios with auxiliaries who improvised within structured guidelines. Similarly, McReynolds and his colleagues (McReynolds & DeVoge, 1977; McReynolds et al., 1981) developed and empirically validated two personality assessment protocols that used structured improvisation—one for individuals and one for couples. In contrast to the protocols used in those assessment approaches, I have developed Rehearsals for Growth (RfG), which is an application of improvisational theater games. The approach structures interpersonal goals,

though not specific situations, and allows auxiliary actors free rein to improvise, offering a less controlled but broader and more impressionistic view of clients' psychosocial functioning.

Characteristics of Improvisation

Improvisation is an activity in which players—clients or other people who intentionally take roles in circumstances acknowledged by all present to be staged—continually adjust to changes in circumstance and character as those are invented in the moment. Most conventional social transactions permit and even encourage a person to encounter a present situation, guided predominantly by expectations derived from known roles, habitual performances, and intended or anticipated outcomes. By contrast, effective improvisation requires that players give up their conception, expectation, and any script about what is supposed to be there and attend to what is happening here and now, both intra- and interpersonally. When stage-improvising, players learn to reduce their reliance on control of the future and experience a risky aliveness—spontaneity—in the present moment. Improvisational enactment, in which players "make it up" as they go along, is therefore far from an artless, random, or haphazard activity. To improvise well, players must be fully attentive and responsive to cues on multiple levels both from their stage partners and from their own impulses, all the while remaining oriented to the time, place, and plot elements already introduced in the scene. Perhaps hardest of all, players need to overcome the deeply ingrained habit of avoiding the influence of others when facing an unknown future. As I have noted (Wiener, 1999, p. 166),

> [C]ompetent stage-improvisation with others also shares a number of characteristics with good interpersonal relationship functioning: *attentiveness* to others' words and actions; *flexibility* in both initiating and accepting others' directions and suggestions (giving up over-control); and making others right (*validation* of their reality, thereby supporting them to look good).

Dramaturgy: Linking Improvisation and Life Performance

One might ask: What characterizes inadequate, adequate, or exceptional improvised performance? One way of assessing observed differences in the way people improvise in structured situations is to note what appropriate role functions are present or absent in their performances. Clients' difficulties in improvisation and in life may be evidence that they are doing poorly in one or more of their performance functions.

The term *performance* has the dual connotations of productive action and artistic display. Psychotherapists have linked theatrical and psychological

process (see Wiener, 1994, Ch. 1). Holt (1992, p. 70), for one, views "all behaviour as necessarily theatrical: necessarily, because theatre is *how* we are invested in reality." Similarly, Moreno (1946, p. 15) stated: "Psychodrama defines the drama as an extension of life and action rather than its imitation." Those assertions are consistent with *dramaturgy,* a perspective that arose in the social sciences during the past sixty years to study how meaning is accomplished in human lives. Unlike behaviorist or psychodynamic psychologies, dramaturgy focuses on "connecting action to its sense rather than behavior to its determinants" (Brisset & Edgley, 1990, p. 2). Dramaturgic theorists share the fundamental principle that ". . . the meaning of people's doings is to be found in the manner in which they express themselves in interaction with similarly expressive others" (Brisset & Edgley, 1990, p. 3).

Dramaturgy is thus a tool for understanding the interpersonal nature of the self and particularly for analyzing the interaction of persons with others. Within dramaturgy, there exists the radical view that considers all social behavior as theatrical performance; persons are always "on stage" and select only a part of their repertoire to display to others (Goffman, 1959). Some drama therapists share that dramaturgic framework, notably Robert Landy (1986), who based his technique on Goffman's analysis of role. Dramaturgic therapists frame assessment more in terms of a client's awkwardly lived life (i.e., a socially inadequate or maladaptive pattern) than in assessing a psychiatric disorder. Therefore, therapists view the majority of problems clients bring to them as the results of the clients' limitations in changing or their failure to choose appropriate performances (Wiener, 1994, pp. 153–154).

In this article, I expand on the approach to psychosocial assessment offered by Holt's (1992) concept that life functioning results from the interplay of both narrative and performance. I have identified five theater-like role functions or capacities, described below, that are needed for competent psychosocial functioning. The five role functions, with their theatrical names, are

1. *Reality-testing* (the Producer), which attends to "what is there" in the physical world and acknowledges "who I am" simultaneously in biological, ideological, familial/cultural, and historical contexts;
2. *Imaginatively creating* (the Author), which empowers one to create, choose, or actively interpret stories, both of what is happening now and of one's life;
3. *Embodying and expressing* (the Performer), which creates, actively interprets, and enacts roles, enabling choice in how to present self to others;
4. *Responsive self-witnessing* (the Spectator), which passively interprets, evaluates, witnesses, and receives the roles performed by self and others; and
5. *Coordinating and balancing* (the Director), which integrates the activities of the previous four functions.

Deficits in these role functions result in performance deficiencies that are revealed by improvisational situation tests, described later.

A Taxonomy of Performance Deficiencies

When a person's Producer is limited, the person has some deficiency in factual grounding, the acknowledgment of the given circumstances of life. The different degrees of factual ungroundedness range from psychotic-level denial (manifested by delusions or a refusal to acknowledge concrete and immediate facts), through "immature defenses" (manifested by a refusal to take responsibility for one's actions [Moffett & Bruto, 1990]), to a post-modern "saturated self" (manifested by a fragmented, shallow, expediency-dominated lifestyle [Gergen, 1991]). The last form of ungroundedness is culturally invisible, found in otherwise well-adjusted people who are unaware of themes that link life events and are likely to underestimate the extent to which others may differ from them in values, priorities, and thought processes.

A complementary deficiency in a person's Author results in the absence of creative imagining, the capacity to create meaning. When confronted with life problems, people lacking this capacity to re-author their lives feel trapped and helpless to improve matters. To them, the limitations of circumstance appear absolute. Their desire to change is restricted to wishing for the restoration of their emotional well-being, devoid of any idea of how to accomplish that. They opt frequently for short-term gratification and relate to others by projecting onto them the roles of either perpetrator of, or savior from, their own distress. The inability of such people to redirect their lives is manifested by a lack of agency; by a tendency to be "factual" in a way that precludes flexibility of viewpoint, attitude, or choice; and by limited ability to grasp purpose in others' actions. I view factual grounding and creative imagining as complementary components of a single dimension, Narrative, which maps the content of what is included in experience.

Another complementary pair of capacities—Performer and Spectator—is needed for adequate psychosocial functioning. The capacity to activate one's Performer is key to an individual's attempts to create and manage impressions of self on others. A limitation of Performer capacity results in people being reduced to social passivity. They are observing their lives rather than experiencing their power to live them directly and are reacting rather than acting. This passivity is manifest when one takes an over-distanced position, often in an emotionally blunted manner, resulting in diminished personal effectiveness in joining with and influencing others.

Also needed for socially competent performance is the Spectator capacity, the complement to the Performer. That capacity is a conscious witnessing that

provides vital feedback to the Performer. Indeed, a role exists and is cocreated only through the reciprocal interplay between Performer and Spectator functions. Those functions can be located in separate persons or within the same person.

An absence of conscious witnessing leaves people unable to perform responsively, evaluate accurately, or choose wisely. Such an absence is manifested by one's taking a narcissistic position (frequently in a highly emotional manner), by egocentrism (an awareness of others only in their role of Spectator to one's own self), by one's feeling misunderstood and wronged by others, by one's incapacity to laugh at self, and by one's inability to shift intentionally to greater detachment or to heightened involvement. These last two capacities, active fulfilling and aware witnessing, are complementary components of a separate dimension, Performance, which maps the process, the "how" of expression toward self and others.

A Dramaturgic Model

To explain the interplay between the dimensions of Narrative and Performance and the operations of the role functions of Producer, Author, Performer and Spectator, I posit a Director, a metarole function that is not part of either dimension and is the core chooser and mover of personality. The Director has functions similar to Schwartz' (1995) Self; it is self-conscious and orchestrates the four role functions by selectively directing awareness and activating energy toward or away from them.

In this Dramaturgic Model, people create and express meaning through a process like this: From the context of given conditions provided by the Producer, the Director becomes aware of role possibilities. The Director activates the Author to devise and select which roles to express. The Performer shapes how the roles are realized, guiding the enactment by internal and external feedback from the Spectator. The resultant performance becomes a factual element, attended to by the Producer, that may activate further expressions from self and others. The process, however, can begin by the Director's activating, either first or concurrently, any of the other positions and then activating the rest in any sequence. Dramaturgic meaning is thus conveyed as a product of activity on both the Narrative and the Performance dimensions. That is in contrast to those Narrative therapy approaches (e.g., Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1993) that attend only to the interplay between authoring and producing and overlook entirely the contribution of the Performance dimension to life and therapy. Healthy interpersonal functioning requires the full and balanced use of Performer–Spectator functions and those of Producer–Author. The Dramaturgic Model is summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Summary of Dramaturgic Model

Dimension	Function	Theatrical Name	Role Function	Capacity	Psychosocial deficiency resulting from role function limitation or restriction
Narrative (content of experience)	Inclusion, interpretation of content	Producer	Factual Grounding	Acknowledgment of factual reality and identity in context	1. At psychotic level: denial of concrete and immediate facts 2. At neurotic level: immature defenses; nonresponsibility 3. At "self-saturated" level: rootlessness, fragmentation of identity, meaninglessness
		Author	Imaginative Creating	Create, choose, and actively interpret stories	Lack of imagination to see beyond present viewpoint; difficulty shifting both attitudes and intensity of involvement.
Performance (processing of experience)	Expression, witnessing of performance	Performer	Active Fulfilling	Actively enact and interpret roles	Passivity; reactive stance; inability to join with or influence others.
		Spectator	Aware Witnessing	Evaluation of performances of self and others	Insensitive or inappropriate performance; narcissism, egocentrism; inability to laugh at oneself.

Case Examples of Improvisational Assessment

As noted previously, improvisation serves as an effective tool for the assessment of the Director's abilities to select, activate, and coordinate the four role functions appropriately in response to a continuously fluid context. The RfG games and exercises, described below, are brief, structured role-playing tasks that elicit improvisational performances. Reliable assessment of performative deficiencies by RfG exercises and games requires repeated observations of such improvised enactments, particularly to determine whether coaching removes the deficiency. Within the limited range of client functioning I have observed in private practice, I have not found that observable limitations in client performances correspond well with conventional mental disorder classifications, such as those found in *DSM-IV.* At times, clients with varied diagnoses can manifest any particular psychosocial deficiency. However, peoples' performative limitations in their improvised enactments regularly do correspond with life evidence of their restricted use of one or more of the Author, Performer, or Spectator functions. A possible reason why restriction in the Producer function does not result in improvisational performance deficiencies is offered in the Discussion section.

A Brief Sketch of Four Clients

To demonstrate the connections between clients' life problems, their performative deficiencies when improvising, and the restrictions in their use of one of the three role functions of the Dramaturgic Model, I describe four clients selected from my practice. In many other cases, clients are only partially limited or show restrictions on more than one dimension. These four were chosen because their lives manifested fairly clear-cut restrictions in the use of one of the four positions. They also had worked with me in group therapy, couples therapy, or family therapy, enacting RfG games and exercises, including those described in the next section.

Don—A 34-yr-old Purchasing Manager

Don had been married for 4 years to Lisa; they had a 2-year-old son. At Lisa's insistence, they had been coming to couples therapy because she found Don's insensitivity to her values worrisome and anticipated that that would gradually drive them apart. Don cared mainly about sports, making money, and keeping up the condition of their house. Don later came alone to improvisational group therapy for several months, not because he saw himself as needing it but because he enjoyed the conversation and enactments. The enactments activated a playful side of Don, which was appreciated by most of the group's members. He described himself as practical, logical, and happy—

qualities he saw as largely lacking in Lisa. For Don, reality was synonymous with his own, unexamined viewpoint; he did not argue with Lisa when she wanted to spend money on cut flowers, just negotiated for how much she could spend on "things they didn't need." The only son of parents of Eastern European ancestry, Don characterized himself simply as an American and showed no interest in his historical, familial, or personal past. He barely tolerated Lisa's large, Southern family, and he was only occasionally around during their visits. Each year Don's work as a purchasing manager for a large, multinational corporation necessitated two or three business trips abroad, which he hated. His lifestyle and functioning are characteristic of people who are "self-saturated" Producer-limited.

Debby—A 29-yr-old Manicurist

Debby lived at her parents' home in the neighborhood where she had been reared and where she was surrounded by family and friends. Her life was highly structured by work, family, local social events, and church. Debby came into therapy with Alex, her boyfriend of the past 18 months, because of his skittishness regarding a commitment to marriage. After seeing them conjointly for eight sessions, I recommended group therapy for Debby, which became part of her routine. She showed little initiative to change her life, which appeared mapped out in a way that she could not conceive of questioning. The aspect of life that perturbed her was Alex's failure to propose marriage; yet she seemed incapable of thinking what would happen to her if he never did. Emotionally, she mostly presented a placid mask, showing little variation in intensity of expressed emotion. Group members felt that she was lacking in empathy when their issues came up; she appeared incapable of grasping how they could think, choose, or value differently from her. Her lifestyle and functioning are characteristic of Author-limited people.

Dave—A 48-yr-old Foreign Language Teacher

Dave entered group therapy after losing his third job at a public high school. He was again in graduate school, this time for a second master's degree in a foreign language. Although polite and well-mannered, other group members soon remarked that he appeared absent-minded, frequently responding to questions and situations without grasping what was expected of him and appearing out of touch with his own and others' feelings. He appeared to have difficulty staying present, easily getting lost in tangential, obsessive ideas and withdrawing under stress. Dave's social life was limited to weekly visits to a chess club. Since the death of his mother two years earlier, he had had little contact with his family, having had only brief telephone contact with his younger sister. He stated that he would like to live with a woman but took

no initiative to socialize. In the past, he had had two superficial relationships that lasted only a few months. Dave's lifestyle and functioning are characteristic of Performer-limited people.

Doris—A 39-yr-old Divorcée

Doris, a recent divorcée, had two daughters, ages 13 and 10. After six individual sessions, she entered group therapy "in order to learn how to pick a better mate next time." Doris had caught her husband in an extramarital affair and had vengefully sought to punish him financially through the divorce proceedings. She also confided inappropriately to her daughters about their father's faults and actively pressured them to side with her partly to hurt him and partly to gain their loyalty and sympathy for herself. In group, Doris was perceived as entertaining but self-centered and stubborn. She was involved in numerous confrontations with other members that she often instigated with her offensive, judgmental remarks. In her social life, she dated actively but not seriously; she was afraid of getting hurt by becoming too involved. Doris also had difficulty keeping women as friends because she occasionally stood them up or canceled plans at the last minute if something better developed—usually a date with a man. When that happened, she was not contrite so her friends dropped her. When she, however, was on the receiving end of even relatively minor snubs, she was deeply hurt. Doris's lifestyle and functioning are characteristic of Spectator-limited people.

Descriptions of Three RfG Enactments

Since 1996, RfG enactments have been divided into exercises, which are activities used with clients in their conventional social roles to help them acquire skills or discover how a relationship functions in some particular aspect, and games, which are lengthier enactments that involve taking up dramatic roles while playing a scene that tells a story. Although I still use other adaptations of the improvisational theater games I developed (Wiener, 1994), I increasingly rely on eight enactment forms for individual and relationship assessment. By using fewer enactment forms for assessment, I have standardized the comparison of improvised responses across clients without sacrificing the essential improvisational character of the RfG method. Three of the enactment forms involve dyadic enactment—Tug-of-War (Wiener, 1996), Puppets (Wiener, 1999), and Master/Servant (Wiener, 1991).

General Preparation

In all improvisation enactments offered in group, couples, or family therapy, clients are invited to participate voluntarily, after they have received an

adequate description of what will follow so that they can give informed consent. Clients are told whether the enactment involves physical movement, and, if so, are asked to take responsibility for their own movement in light of any physical limitation they might have and to inform their partner(s) of any limitations. All clients wear casual clothing; women are encouraged to wear slacks and remove shoes with heels. Clients are instructed to mime the existence and use of any props and are reminded that the characters they create and portray are free to say and do anything. Clients act out only the bodily contact that had been previously specified and mutually agreed to. The players receive some instruction in the fundamental rule of improvisation, namely, to "accept all offers." An *offer* is any behavior that can be noticed. Thus, to accept an offer is to treat a behavior as factually true within the scene. For a more complete discussion of the pragmatics of staging RfG enactments, see chapter 9 of Wiener (1994).

For the purposes of this article, the three clients described—Debbie, Dave, and Doris—were paired with a different partner for each enactment. Where a relationship outside of therapy existed between the client and partner, that was noted. I emphasized that no enactment can be judged in its entirety as good or deficient and that the contribution of the clients' partners cannot be fully separated from that of the clients. Nevertheless, because the partners of the three clients generally improvised well with other players, it seems plausible to conclude that deficiencies across enactments in which the clients were players point to the clients' being mainly responsible for those deficiencies.

Enactment 1—Tug-of-War, First Phase of the Exercise

Instructions. Two players face one another and are about 6 ft apart, with some room behind each. I tell them that there is an imaginary rope on the ground between them and that on a signal from me, they are to pick up the rope and begin a tug-of-war. The partners are to maintain eye contact and to play without using words (sound is okay). I announce that a winner is to be determined within thirty and signal the partners to begin. At the end of thirty seconds (frequently, no winner emerges), I stop the action and ask each partner to discuss how he or she experienced the contest, to describe personal impulses, and tell what each noticed about the partner's actions during the contest. The partners were assessed for the following qualities: paying attention to one's partner, accepting (body) offers, cocreating a workable reality, making the partner look good, and giving up one's anxiety about controlling of the outcome.

An Example of Good Improvisation. At my signal, Greg and Gay slowly picked up the imaginary rope, maintaining eye contact. As they positioned

their bodies to pull, there was a two-second period during which their tension was equal. Then Greg began slowly to pull, hand over hand; as he did so, Gay's arms moved away from her body toward him, and her balance shifted forward. Finally, Greg gave a sharp yank and Gay stumbled toward him, laughing. Both seemed pleased with the outcome.

Three Examples of Deficient Improvisation.

1. Debby (Author restricted): When Debby and her boyfriend Alex were invited to try that exercise in couples therapy, she objected on the grounds that "he's so much bigger than me," overlooking the fact that the imaginary rope nullified any physical advantage. After I explained that, they began the contest. Alex started to move his arms toward Debby, signaling that she was pulling him. Debbie, looking baffled, symmetrically followed suit, attempting to yield to Alex. That at once destroyed the illusion of a tug-of-war. Afterward, Debby stated that she thought it good manners to reciprocate Alex's offer to have her win. "And what else could I have done?" she asked.

2. Dave (Performer restricted): At my signal, Carol began miming pulling with great effort while Dave remained in position, neither pulling nor being pulled. Next, Carol gave a number of short pulls while Dave held on, not looking at her as he leaned slightly backward. Carol dropped the rope, angry. Dave appeared uncomfortable; he began to justify his reluctance to get involved in the exercise.

3. Doris (Spectator restricted): As I gave the signal to begin, Diane started to pull on the rope. Doris voiced her objection, saying that she had not been ready and that Diane should have waited. Starting again, both pulled hand over hand, resulting in a "taffy" rope and no real winner, because neither had yielded to the other's pulling. Afterward, Doris stated that she had really won, overlooking Diane's symmetrical behavior.

Commentary. The main purpose of the exercise is for the partners to cocreate the stage reality of a physical struggle, which is accomplished by their closely attending to one another. The stage reality does not allow a "rubber" rope, meaning one that could be seen as stretching or going slack. Players need to treat the rope as a reality of their interaction; one's hauling in rope implies the other's being pulled toward the center. The secondary purposes are to explore each partner's commitment to winning or losing and getting a decisive result and to have the partners to learn how the relative intensity of those desires is signaled and responded to in the exercise. As with all enactments, it is also important to learn whether clients enjoyed the enactment or how they judged themselves or their partners for the outcome. Another feature to observe is whether the emotional climate of their relationship shifted following the enactment.

Enactment 2—The Puppets Game

Instructions. One player is seated in an armless chair while the other stands behind the chair. The seated player plays the puppet, who is permitted to speak but not to move his body. The standing player is the puppeteer, who is allowed to move his own body and to manipulate the head and limbs of the puppet. Their task is for them together to play the character of an expert who is giving an impromptu lecture on an absurd topic chosen for them to an audience, which is an essential element for this performance, even if the therapist is the only one available. An absurd topic keeps the players from being distracted by the need to contribute meaningful content and enables them to concentrate on creating an expressive performance of the expert role. Before beginning the task, the players are coached briefly in how the puppeteer is to move the puppet and how the puppet is to accept the movements given by the puppeteer. After the enactment and its verbal processing, the game may be repeated with roles reversed or with different partners. The players were assessed for the following qualities: paying attention to one's partner, making and accepting (body) offers, cocreating a workable reality (story), making one's partner look good, and giving up anxiety-based overcontrolling of the outcome.

An Example of Good Improvisation. George as the puppet and Gladys as the puppeteer lectured on "Job Placement Services for Mice." Gladys began by placing George's open hands over his ears. George, in a worried tone, began: "Are they gone? I can only take so much squeaking!" Gladys had him mop his brow, and George said: "We've placed fourteen mice in high-paying positions this week alone! They're in great demand for factory work, work hard and are eager to get ahead—but are they pushy!" At that point, Gladys held George's hands straight out in front of him, palms forward. The game went on in that way, with both players responsive to the other's offers, cocreating an entertaining performance of an overwhelmed job counselor telling his troubles to the audience.

Three Examples of Deficient Improvisations.

1. Debby (Author restricted): During a group therapy session with the lecture topic "Making Art from Leftover Food," Debby was the puppet. Derrick, as puppeteer, cocked her head to one side. Debby seemed at a loss about how to begin, so I prompted her to make up something on the topic. In a hesitant tone, Debby said: "When you have food in the refrigerator that has already been cooked, that's leftovers. (Derrick moved her arms in front of her and set her hands clapping together.) I think it's artistic to make leftovers tasty." (Derrick now centered Debby's head and made it nod slowly.) "Gravy can make

cold meat delicious," continued Debby in a serious tone. Debby continued an emotionally flat, repetitious discourse on how different leftover foods could be made more palatable, not making use of Derrick's offers. I intervened, reminding them that their character was a lively, entertaining lecturer. From that point on, Debby became more animated, though still not fully accepting of physical offers from Derrick. Afterward she acknowledged her awareness of the uninspired impression made by her character before my coaching but stated she "didn't see what I could have done about it." Debby also knew she was not fully accepting Derrick's offers, yet she felt the game was "just too weird." It was evident that she had tuned out any body awareness during the enactment.

2. Dave (Performer restricted): The lecture topic given was "How to Dance While Knitting." As puppeteer, Dave held Cindy's wrists and waved her arms from side to side overhead. Cindy began lecturing on how one could hold yarn while dancing. Dave continued to hold her wrists and make small circles with them. While Cindy tried to adjust the content of her lecture to the movements Dave gave her body, Dave mechanically continued to hold her wrists, changing the movement slightly about every 5 sec. Afterward, Cindy complained, with justification, that he had given her nothing on which to build the scene, nor had he heeded what she was saying. Dave replied that he was trying to create a dance with her arms as his contribution to the scene.

3. Doris (Spectator restricted): The lecture topic was "The Sex Life of the Amoeba." Doris was the puppet; Doug placed her initially with her index finger extended up, out in front of her face. Doris began well: "One thing you must remember about amoebas is that they are NOT asexual; you were lied to in high school biology!" However, that was the last time during the scene that she incorporated Doug's movements of her body. Although she let him move her, she continued to give a witty lecture, oblivious to his further efforts. When reviewing the exercise, Doris saw Doug's movements as a challenging distraction, rather than as a helpful contribution to her own performance. The notion that his movement could have opened up her imagination was totally foreign to her, because she viewed the task not as a mutual enterprise but as "her lecture."

Commentary. The main purpose of the game is for players to cocreate an active and aligned partnership in developing both the lecture and the character of the lecturer. Because each partner controls only one aspect of the character, they must coordinate their efforts, each making constructive offers that are consistent with what has been established thus far and accepting the offers of the partner by modifying what they contribute next. When that occurs, there is a heightened spirit of partnership; players enjoy improvising with one another and performing for the audience.

Enactment 3—Scenarios From the Master/Servant Game

Instructions. Players are given the roles of Master or Mistress and Servant. Although contemporary workplace scenarios between bosses and subordinates fit the form, it is preferable to distance the scene from such realism. Hence, I typically suggest a foreign setting in a bygone era, such as dramatizations featuring 18th- or 19th-century nobility interacting with servants. In the basic scenario, the Master summons the Servant and gives orders. The Master's job is to play a person of high status, and the Servant is to support or elevate the Master's status. After a brief enactment, the players are debriefed about to their feelings about the two characters. The therapist then makes suggestions, and the scene is replayed. The entire process is then repeated with the players exchanging roles. The players are evaluated for the following qualities: paying attention to one's partner, making and accepting (body) offers, adjusting one's behavior to indicate the appropriate status, cocreating a workable reality, making one's partner look good, and giving up anxiety-based overcontrolling of the outcome.

Commentary. Status here does not refer to social standing or occupational prestige but to behavior that signals one's importance in relation to others. In this game, when the Servant plays high status to the Master's low, it is a plausible, though comic, scene. The main purpose of the game is for the players to create a scene in which each is attuned to the other's nuanced adjustment of status, so that each character meets the other's expectations. Achieving that requires that both understand status transactions and pay close attention to the partner.

An Example of Good Improvisation. When Gail as Mistress impatiently rang the hand-bell, Gene as Servant entered apologetically, drawing a reprimand from her. Gene shrank a little into himself and, with eyes lowered, abjectly apologized. After he had gone on a while, Gail interrupted him, ordering him to bring the car around. Gene hesitated, then asked which car she wanted, the Rolls Royce or the Jaguar. "The Rolls, of course," Gail snapped. "We always take the Rolls when calling on the Vicar." "But madam," Gene humbly replied, "I seem to remember you telling me last Sunday that we'd be taking the Jag next week." Gail started; her tone becoming uncertain, even frightened. "Oh dear, dear, that's so. I do seem to be more forgetful nowadays, Samuel." Gene drew himself up, helped Gail to her feet, and handed her a cane. "Oh, no, madam, with all of your responsibilities, it's a wonder you can attend to so many details," he said in a benevolently paternal tone. Gail, walking off stage stiffly with the aid of the cane, replied softly, "You're being very kind to an old lady, Samuel," ending the scene.

Three Examples of Deficient Improvisation.

1. Debby (Author restricted): Debby began the scene as Mistress by asking Daphne, a group member Debby deferred to, to help her select her clothes for the day. It was immediately apparent to everyone else that Debby did not take a high status position because she came across as asking a favor, not giving an order. What ensued was a conversation between friends instead of a Master/Servant scene. I coached Debby to begin again, stressing her entitlement to being served. This time Debby sounded reproachful but still not in charge. Because she had previously witnessed a number of other group members enact the same scene and had played a low-status Servant adequately before, I concluded that her performative failure was not because of unfamiliarity with the concept but rather because of her inability to enact a status position that was the opposite of her accustomed role with Daphne in real life.

2. Dave (Performer restricted): Dave was assigned the role of Master. Seated and alone on stage at the beginning of the scene, he began a soliloquy about how difficult it was to get good help and had to be prompted to summon Calvin. When Calvin entered, Dave asked him for a breakfast tray and began to explain why his request was reasonable, forgetting that his stage role as Master justified his giving orders. Prompted once more to order breakfast, he did so in an impersonal tone; when Calvin mimed bringing in the tray, Dave began a monologue, addressed to no one in particular, on the importance of starting the day with a hearty breakfast. Afterward, Dave was baffled when he received feedback that he ignored Calvin and explained that his character was thoughtfully instructing the Servant about his Master's habits.

3. Doris (Spectator restricted): Doris entered the scene briskly as Daryl called loudly for her to bring him his afternoon snack. She whirled about on stage, putting down the tray, arranging the table while she talked incessantly about what she was doing. Daryl commented that she had forgotten his napkin. Instead of accepting the offer, Doris pointed to a spot in thin air, saying that the napkin was there, blocking his offer and thereby making her partner wrong. Daryl, adjusting quickly, stated that that was not his napkin, the one he was used to having. With an almost insubordinate air, Doris plucked the napkin and headed offstage with it. Afterward, Doris was defensive about her block, arguing that it was a valid contribution to the scene. She was not receptive to acknowledging that her character had lowered the status of the Master by flatly contradicting him, and she resisted the notion that it was appropriate for the Master to lower her status in the role of Servant. Table 2 contains summaries of the performance deficiencies of each of the clients presented above.

Discussion

It is aesthetically satisfying to have role function restrictions assessed reliably by deficiencies in improvisational performance, but that was not the case

TABLE 2
Client Descriptions and Performance Deficiencies

Client	General Characteristics	Role-function limitation	*Tug-of-War* performance deficiencies	*Puppets* performance deficiencies	*Master/Servant* performance deficiencies
Don	Self-satisfied; uncaring of values of others; unaware of differences in others' thought processes; disinterested in roots of own identity	Producer	None	None	None
Debby	Conventional-minded, unadventurous; limited initiative or curiosity; emotionally placid, limited empathy	Author	Didn't use imagination to create the illusion of the rope; applied real social and physical limitations to fantasy	Blocked offers; didn't find character in scene until coached; showed a lack of initiative; uncomfortable with novelty of game's premise	Unable to separate self from character; her real life status overrode status of her role

Dave	Out of touch with feelings of self and others; difficulty staying present; withdrawing under stress; socially ineffectual	Performer	Didn't attend to, or accept offers from partner, justified his reluctance to get involved in the scene	Made inadequate physical offers; didn't accept partner's offers; attempted to play scene only according to own ideas	Didn't take character fully; unobservant. Didn't acknowledge partner's character; missed the point of interaction between players; preoccupied with own ideas
Doris	Egocentric; insensitive to others' feelings: judgmental, while over-sensitive herself; competitive with others	Spectator	Mistook competitive premise of the exercise as a personal challenge; unwillingness to accept partner's offer	Failed to work with partner; saw the game as starring herself; understood partner's contribution merely as a distraction	Blocked partner's offer; made partner look bad; competitively tried to "steal the scene"; inappropriately protective of her character's status

with those assessments. As I noted previously, there was no characteristic improvising deficit correlated with restriction of the Producer function, at least not at the "saturated self" level. The most likely reason for that is that RfG games, being inventions of the moment, independent from players' actual identities, do not draw on a player's rootedness or relatedness in real life. Indeed, it might even be a slight advantage in improvising to be unencumbered by awareness of one's specific real-life identity.

Furthermore, unawareness and nonacceptance of the givens of our lives often promote shallow, self-serving character development, producing people who are unwilling to fulfill ethical obligations or to participate for the social good. Factual grounding does not require resignation to or complete identification with the givens of life, only full acknowledgment of their existence and influence. Although psychosocial deficits are among the life problems that can be assessed by improvisational performance, I must emphasize that psychological health requires more than being performatively skilled. It demands, for one thing, a genuine regard for the rights and feelings of others.

Moreover, therapists can be limited by their own restricted functions. For example, Salvator Minuchin's opinion of certain narrative therapists is that they are

> . . . restricted to operating only in a collaborative, symmetrical posture. Gone is the latitude to play, to give opinions, to be the complex, multifaceted person in the therapy room that you are outside it. All that remains is a distant, respectful questioner. (Simon, 1996, p. 52)

That description corresponds closely with the Performer-restricted position. The clear implication is that therapists themselves, wishing to be optimally effective, need to deploy a full and balanced range of role functions.

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