

A PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY OF JOKES

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of the research was the creation of a theory which could extend the theory begun by Sigmund Freud in 1905. The theory was based on the "economic" and "topographical" parts of analytic theory; the "structural" part of the theory was not published until 1923, and has hitherto never been completely applied to an understanding of jokes. A number of jokes from the American oral culture were selected and analyzed using a psychoanalytic theory containing economic, topographical, and structural parts, together with post Freudian psychoanalytic theories of the ego. In the analysis, the presence of the id, ego, and superego representations were identified in the narrative of the jokes as symbolic representations, personifications, or by implication. Jokes were found to have many more psychological themes than sexuality and aggression, as originally postulated by Freud, and a variety of aspects of ego and superego functions were found. All jokes were found to have sexual and/or aggressive themes, however. A new theory of jokes was formulated as an extension of the original Freudian theory, utilizing these new insights. As an addendum, this new theory was then briefly discussed in terms of its use in clinical practice.

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Introduction

Sigmund Freud, writing in 1928, said "In my work on 'Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious' (1905) I considered humour really from the economic point of view alone."¹ The economic theory of psychoanalysis differs from, but is not contradictory to, the structural theory. The economic theory is concerned with discharge of affects or drives and the maintenance of a balance in the "economy" of the basic drive system. The structural theory describes the psychic structures of id, ego, and superego, and the interaction between them. In 1905 the structural theory was not developed sufficiently to figure in Freud's major work on jokes and humor. The subsequent psychoanalytic literature deals with jokes very little, and there is no structural viewpoint.

In order to further our understanding of the meaning and importance of jokes, this theoretical study collects and analyzes a number of jokes. Using the psychoanalytic method, with a particular emphasis on structural theory, further psychoanalytic theory is suggested to improve our ability to analyze jokes. The narrative content of a

¹ Sigmund Freud, Character and Culture (New York: Collier Company, 1963), p. 263.

joke, by virtue of conscious, unconscious, and cultural dimensions, is similar to the contents of a play, novel, or work of art. By analyzing the various levels of content structurally, the role jokes play in describing shared or universal intrapsychic conflicts and suggesting potential (successful and unsuccessful) resolutions of these conflicts is examined.

Other issues which are not the focus of the study are tangentially considered: motivations in telling jokes, motivations in hearing jokes, and the use of jokes in psychotherapy. It is my view that jokes have more to offer as a source of psychoanalytic insight than is currently supposed. This study is a theory building project.

Purpose of the Study

The central purpose of this theoretical investigation is to examine and suggest likely conscious and unconscious meanings in the content of jokes, by using the psychoanalytic method with emphasis on the structural theory. Further analysis is applied to suggest generalizations about the content of jokes and to propose additions to psychoanalytic theory, supported by the research findings.

A secondary goal is to shed light on other questions that cluster around the main issue. These include: motivations for telling and hearing jokes, and the use of

jokes in psychotherapy. These issues, however, emerge as part of the main study and are not meant to be principal variables for investigation.

Importance of the Study

In my experience, jokes are rarely analyzed in the therapeutic situation. It is an assumption of the present study that a richer, more complex knowledge and understanding of jokes would aid in clinical practice and in understanding of a patient's psycho-dynamic status. The study has the potential to raise awareness in clinicians that there is a good deal of meaning in jokes, and also, to suggest a more specific and detailed theory of jokes to assist the clinical use of this material. The present attitude about jokes, which has evolved from Freud, is that jokes simply express sexuality and/or aggression, and there is a tendency at present to dismiss jokes as a resistance to treatment rather than to interpret them psychodynamically.

In clinical practice two kinds of theories are important: theories of personality and theories of practice. Since a theory of personality is essential to forming a theory of practice and doing clinical work, a theory of personality has importance. The purpose of this study is to enlarge upon the current psychoanalytic theory of personality; this, by inference, can suggest alterations in a theory of practice.

The investigator considers important issues in the clinical application of the findings, but this is not the primary focus of the study.

Literature Review

A detailed review of the social science literature, plus a general survey of other fields, reveals an abundance of unsystematic essays on laughter, comedy, humor, and satire, but references to jokes, and particularly to jokes from the perspective of psychoanalysis, are limited.² Subsumed under the rather general rubric of humor or comedy are a diversity of subjects and point of view. Often definitions are imprecise and distinctions are not made. Subjects such as wit, jokes, banter, goodwill, affability, ridicule, humor, satire, and parody are often confused or merged into one general category. If one reviews only literature about jokes from the viewpoint of a psychoanalytic theory of personality, there are only a handful of references.

²For this study, a computer search was done. The key topics of humor, jokes, psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy produced a list of about 80 articles from professional journals in the Psychological Data Base covering the period 1970 to the present. The Psychological Data Base includes a long list of journals in the social and biological sciences. These citations represent the closest one can get to current professional writing on jokes and psychoanalysis. Also, certain famous books and articles, considered to be authoritative in this area, were included, such as works by Freud, Reik, Grotjahn, and others.

There are more articles about the use of humor in clinical practice. These articles deal principally with theories of clinical practice and make but slight reference to theories of personality. Not all of these articles are based on psychoanalytic theory, but they are reviewed to give a fuller picture of current and recent thinking on the general topic of humor. These articles are grouped together in Section One of the review and are followed by Section Two, which is devoted to the citations that more closely address the topic of this study.

Humor and Psychotherapy. Some of the most poorly constructed of the articles used an implied definition of humor as (one would guess) an attitude of affability, friendly banter, or good will. Claudia Dewane in an article titled "Humor in Therapy" does not, for example, really specify what she means by "humor," but one would infer she means something of the nature of a nice, friendly, endearing attitude of banter.³ She thinks this is good for rapport in the early stages of treatment, adds to the "therapeutic alliance," "redirects" aggression, is cathartic, is a "social lubricant." The author believes confrontive humor can be hostile and derogatory by worker or client. Unfortunately, she gives no theoretical support for her assertions, cites few supporting sources, and gives no

³Claudia Dewane, "Humor in Therapy," Social Work, November, 1978, Vol. 23, pp. 508-510.

clinical examples. What she means by "humor" is not specified, and we have only her unsupported statement that these recommendations are good.

Another example of this class of article is one from an Alderian journal by Harry Olson. In "The Use of Humor in Psychotherapy," he recommends the use of "humor" that does not ridicule the patient; he also does not define "humor."⁴ Like other writers he thinks it builds friendliness and rapport. One gathers that his treatment is all supportive. Olson says,

"As part of the therapeutic relationship humor becomes encouraging . . . and takes the edge off the client's anxiety regarding the awesomeness of the therapist . . .⁵ it shows that the therapist is a 'regular guy.'"

Again, there is little theoretical discussion, no clinical examples, and scant documentation.

Both of these articles seem to be advocating a rather vague good fellowship and when examined from a psychoanalytic point of view seem to ignore, or be ignorant of, the unconscious or the transference. Neither author considers the value of negative transference feelings in the conduct of psychotherapy, and they suggest the use of "humor" as a deterrent to anger.

⁴ Harry Olson, "The Use of Humor in Psychotherapy," Individual Psychologist, May, 1976, Vol. 13, pp. 79-83.

⁵ Ibid.

The issue of transference is tangentially approached by Harold Greenwald in "Humor in Psychotherapy."⁶ Although Greenwald says that he has analytic training, he seems to be opposed to the use of the transference neurosis in the treatment of patients' he says that treatment should be "fun" and that the therapist should avoid appearing to be "God" and should be humorous to appear more "human." Greenwald, also, does not define humor very well, but seems to be talking about both banter and witticisms. He believes that analysis does not produce much feeling in patients and that his "humor" (witty and provocative jibes) makes the patient more full of feelings and more treatable. He teases patients about symptoms but says that since he is such a skillful therapist, and not at all hostile in intent, that the effect is constructive, not destructive.

Greenwald's confidence in his ability to deliver pointed jibes in a non-threatening, and even affectionate manner would be seriously questioned by Laurence Kubie. Kubie in his article, "The Destructive Potential of Humor in Psychotherapy" said,

"Under a barrage of the therapist's self-gratifying and exhibitionistic humor, the patient suffers silently . . . to have someone viewing his pain with charm and easy humor may gratify the self admiring therapist, but never the patient."⁸

⁶ Harold Greenwald, "Humor in Psychotherapy," Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy, February, 1975, Vol. 7, pp. 113-116.

⁷ Laurence Kubie, "The Destructive Potential of Humor in Psychotherapy," American Journal of Psychiatry, January, 1970, Vol. 127, pp.863.

⁸ Ibid.

Since Kubie is a respected training analyst, his ideas need to be pondered seriously. He seems to be very aware of the issues raised by other writers. They try to use humor and bantering to handle anxiety in themselves and the patient and thereby wish to achieve a "fake rapport."

Kubie says,

"Humor is (also attractive) to the constricted therapist . . . he can parade himself as a wit before the eyes of the patient . . . it is also a way of letting down the bars . . . against counter-transference as the therapist (uses) humor in a gesture of enticement . . . it is perhaps the most seductive use of transference wooing."⁹

Kubie thinks there is a critical difference between laughing with someone and laughing at someone. There is too much hostility in humor, especially in the beginning phase of treatment. Also, one does not know the effect of humor on a particular patient in the beginning phase of treatment which is a convincing reason for not using it early. This view is in direct opposition to the very popular idea that humor helps rapport in the beginning. Kubie's reasoning, however, seems more logical. Humor is only tolerable late in treatment when its effect can be predicted and should only be attempted by a senior skilled therapist, and then only to help mobilize a patient to utilize insight already achieved. However, Kubie still thinks it should be very sparingly used and no inexperienced therapist should be encouraged to use it.

⁹ Ibid.

Kubie's views about utilizing insight are somewhat in harmony with those of Martin Grotjahn, who will be discussed below. Kubie's argument is well reasoned, consistent, and in harmony with psychoanalytic theory. His stature in the field, plus the quality of his article, make his ideas very persuasive, and anyone advocating a different position would be wise to deal with all of his reasoning and provide equally convincing arguments to the contrary.

There is an article which attempts to do that: "The Place of Humor in Psychotherapy" was written by Warren Poland as a rebuttal to the Kubie article, a year later (1971).¹⁰ Poland thinks that humor has a place in treatment but agrees with Kubie that it has a potential for harm. He thinks that "spontaneity" is a good quality in a therapist, and that he shows this with humor; he also thinks it is good for the therapeutic alliance. We learn what he means by humor in the two short cases examples he cites. He makes what would be called "witty" remarks. He thinks these remarks made a better feeling and got two stalled cases going again. He mentions Racker's concept of the "identification mode of countertransference" as explaining the effective drop in negative transference after the witticisms were offered. The case examples are not detailed enough for the reader to judge whether he would agree with these findings. One also

¹⁰ Warren Poland, "The Place of Humor in Psychotherapy," American Journal of Psychiatry, November, 1971, Vol. 128, pp. 97-99.

wonders if negative transference would not be better handled through interpretation rather than by injecting good humor into the situation. Both Kubie and Grotjahn favor humor as a means of retracing insight already gained.

Martin Grotjahn is recognized by most writers as an authority on humor, and his best known work on the subject is the book, Beyond Laughter, which will be discussed later. Grotjahn has some ideas about humor used in treatment that are expressed in "Laughter in Group Psychotherapy."¹¹ He thinks a group therapist can express laughter, but not rage or sadness, and that "jokes can be an excellent method of making an interpretation . . . (which can often bypass resistance."¹² The idea that jokes bypass resistance is implied by Freud in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. Grotjahn thinks laughter can be a sign of mastery over unconscious content; this is in agreement with Edith Jacobson's article on laughter in children (discussed below) and also, he believes that laughter in a group promotes the group's feeling of solidarity. This latter idea is a main point in Theodore Reik's book on Jewish Wit in which Reik states that Jewish wit binds Jews together. Grotjahn's recommendations are for group therapy and do not, necessarily, refute Kubie, who is talking about individual treatment.

¹¹ Martin Grotjahn, "Laughter in Group Psychotherapy, International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, April, 1971, Vol. 21, pp. 234-238.

¹² Ibid., p. 236.

In marked contrast to the theoretical or clinical articles by psychoanalysts, there is a larger group of articles and dissertations that attempted to test the use of humor in counseling and psychotherapy empirically. For example, in Rosalee Golub's dissertation, "An Investigation of the Effect of the Use of Humor in Counseling," a video-taped interview (with actors) was shown to thirty subjects who were, themselves, not patients in treatment.¹³ The video tape showed a "therapist" using "confronting" humor to a "client." The reactions of the subjects to this tape were asked. The subjects were a group of lay people who were asked to rate the activity of the therapist. Golub wanted to learn whether the actions of the "therapist" would be viewed as helpful to the "client" by the raters evaluating the tape. The investigator found no interater reliability during the course of the study.

Sylvia Kaneko's dissertation for Smith College School of Social Work on "The Role of Humor in Psychotherapy" was an exploratory study seeking to find a model for studying humor in psychotherapy.¹⁴ Rating scales were developed to count how many times "laughter or gaiety" occurred in the treatment sessions. The study was of the number of times these phenomena occurred; the study did not attempt to

¹³ Rosalee Golub, "An Investigation of the Effect of the Use of Humor in Counseling," (Dissertation, Purdue University, 1979).

¹⁴ Sylvia Kanoko, "The Role of Humor in Psychotherapy," (Dissertation. Smith College School for Social Work, 1972).

investigate the meaning or effect of the laughter or gaiety. Expert evaluators were used to develop rating scales to record these data.

In Elcha Buckman's dissertation for Boston University, "The Use of Humor in Psychotherapy."¹⁵ The opinions of eight therapists were examined. In this study the therapists were asked their views of their own work in regard to the use of humor. The therapists fell into two groups: "psychoanalytic orientation" and "systems orientation." The psychoanalytic group thought humor "increased vulnerability of the therapist" and interfered with the transference. The systems group thought of humor as a "therapeutic use of the self" which helped rapport through self disclosure and "shared human interaction." A good case can be made that these two positions are, indeed, polarities. A review of the literature shows the second "systems" or "humanistic" view is much favored. Currently, many more people advocate positions similar to the "systems" group described in this dissertation. It could be said that it is not merely a matter of "style" but reflects a basic attitude about transference. The "systems" faction does not want (or perhaps does not understand) transference reactions; self revelation decreases and discourages transference neurosis formation, both positive and negative.

¹⁵ Elcha Buckman, "The Use of Humor in Psychotherapy," (Dissertation, Boston University, 1980).

A synthesis of these various observations suggests some agreement that humor, self-revelation, and being "a real person" or "human" does have the effect of reducing the transference. Although negative transference is most often the issue, one would point out that psychoanalytic theory suggests that both positive and negative transference would be reduced under these conditions (as differentiated from positive and negative feelings not based on transference). Further, there is agreement that humor and self revelation promote a rapport early in the treatment. Kubie calls this a "false rapport."

What the "humanistic" therapists refer to as an improved "therapeutic alliance" would not be seen as such by Kubie or Ralph Greenson, inasmuch as the alliance would not be directed to an analysis of the transference by means of the observing ego. The therapeutic alliance as defined in psychoanalysis is a special artifact of analytic style treatment and is not a friendly relationship or an easy one.

The articles are in broad agreement that humor can hurt people, but there is no agreement on what specific kinds of humor do or do not hurt, or under what conditions. In the article written by Irene Bloomfield, "Humor in Psychotherapy and Analysis," she does not define what she means by humor, but by reading the article one infers that she does not mean "wit" (which tends to be aggressive and hostile) or "jokes"

(which require a dramatic presence or forcefulness), but rather she is talking about what one might call "good natured" remarks.¹⁶ Bloomfield thinks humor makes the therapist more human and less idealized. In terms of the discussion of transference, this would put her in the "humanistic," rather than the psychoanalytic group.

Another article of this kind is John Schimel's "The Function of Wit and Humor in Psychoanalysis."¹⁷ Schimel refers to the article by Kubie and notes that Kubie is a compassionate and respected analyst. Although he attempts to deal with Kubie's objections to humor in treatment, his arguments do not really answer the issues except by contradiction. Schimel is also noteworthy for his attempt to define wit and humor, and perhaps in his definition of humor lies his best chance of answering Kubie. Schimel says,

"Humor in psychotherapy is not only possible, but a humorous view of life's circumstances might well be considered an appropriate goal for intensive or reconstructive psychotherapy."¹⁸

Further on, he says,

"One might suggest . . . that the use of wit or humor may serve a global or transcendental or metapsychological interpretation . . . of the patient's dilemmas."¹⁹

¹⁶Irene Bloomfield, "Humor in Psychotherapy and Analysis," International Journal of Social Psychiatry, Vol. 26, 2-80, pp. 124-127.

¹⁷Schimel, John, "The Function of Wit and Humor in Psychoanalysis," Journal of American Academy of Psychoanalysis, July, 1978, Vol.6, pp.369-379.

¹⁸Ibid., p.371.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 372.

With regard to the positions of Schimel it could be suggested that he has departed from classical analytic theory and method. A good argument might be made that the humor or wit that he is talking about fails the test of analytic method inasmuch as it is teaching. It is kindly, wise, well intentioned, and perhaps even a superior world view to that held by the patient, however, it may be teaching nevertheless. The analytic ethic and method suggests that the function of the analyst is to remove repression, and the patient puts together his own new way of seeing the world from this new perspective of being in touch with the unconscious. Schimel's notion of humor is somewhat similar to Reik's idea of Jewish wit: jokes and wit contain wisdom. It is controversial as to how much wisdom the therapist should impart to the patient.

It is the investigator's position that an appropriate use of humor in analytically oriented treatment would be as follows: it is within the analytic theory of treatment to use the jokes and humor of the patient to learn about his unconscious through conventional analysis of the symbolic material in his jokes and humor.

It is similarly appropriate for the therapist to analyze the jokes that come to his own mind during the treatment, as a part of the usual analysis of countertransference.

The use of jokes for interpretation is controversial. The use of jokes for teaching or inspiration is not part of conventional analytic method. These issues will be discussed further in the section of the study on clinical application of the theory.

A Definition of Jokes. In order to focus this study, a definition of jokes is necessary. There is both a generic and specific meaning to the word. The dictionary gives this definition, "A joke is something done or said to provoke laughter, especially, a brief oral narrative with a climatic humorous twist."²⁰ The first part of the definition is generic and includes tricks, humorous riddles, puns, repartee, wit, humorous aphorisms, nonsense, humorous stories, etc. The "brief oral narrative with a climatic humorous twist," is the specific aspect of the definition which sets a joke clearly apart from other forms of humor. It is the principal dimension of a joke that makes the latter accessible to structural analysis. By virtue of "characters" or "personifications" in particular relationship to one another, the story provides all the necessary features for psychoanalytic interpretation, as a dream would. In the definition of a joke as a brief narrative with a humorous twist at the conclusion, the word "narrative" is assumed to be present if the joke has the bare essentials of a story;

²⁰Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Ninth Edition.

that is, a person, or persons perform some sequential acts from which there is some outcome or conclusion. This is differentiated from, say, the humorous riddle or the "one liner" for which there is no story.

The term "humorous" or "funny" is taken as something understood, or "given," and this study does not attempt to investigate the mechanisms of why a joke is funny. Freud has dealt with this at length, and some mention of it is made, but it is not the focus of this study. In consideration of the joke as having a "humorous twist," the word "twist" implies surprise; that is, the conclusion is unexpected. Ernst Kris felt the surprise was an integral part of a rapid release of tension and contributed to the pleasure of hearing the joke.²¹ These considerations are central to the focus of this study; the process of humor, the conversion or release of energy through surprise, extreme unbearable conflict, or other mechanisms is crucial to the economic theory of jokes. Only the story or narrative in a joke is subject to symbolic interpretation and structural analysis.

Freud's Economic Theory of Jokes. Freud's contribution to understanding jokes and humor is found in his book Jokes

²¹Ernst Kris, "Ego Development and the Comic," American Journal of Psychoanalysis, Vol. 19, pp. 77-90.

and Their Relation to the Unconscious and his short article, "Humor," and most of the subsequent literature on the subject of humor refers to it. Freud thought that laughter is caused by the temporary freeing of unconscious material by the joke and that the energy consequently released (by the temporary lack of necessity for repression) is transformed into laughter. Repressed sexual or aggressive material is held in check by the unconscious; this takes energy. The joke, as an outside force, nullifies the repression temporarily and results in a "saving of energy." In 1905, Freud had yet to formulate the structured part of the psychoanalytic theory involving the dynamic interaction of ego, superego, and id. Pre-oedipal psychology was rather undeveloped; ego-psychology, object-relations theory, and a more complex theory of defenses was still to come.

All jokes, according to Freud, express repressed sexual or aggressive drives. The "smutty" joke is an attempt at seduction, or failing that, of an enjoyment of the idea. There can be a hostile or aggressive component if the joke degrades the object of seduction. Generally, three individuals are needed to fulfill the requirement of the joke; namely, the joke teller, the butt of the joke, and the listener. The joke teller is able to enjoy the approval of the listener, and this helps him justify the sexuality or hostility of

the joke. The listener gives approval. This concept seems to be a precursor to the superego concept. Aggressive jokes are the same; repressed hatred is returned to consciousness in an acceptable form. The joke-work, like dream work, alters the idea into a form that can provide gratification, which at the same time, is acceptable (to the critical part of the person). The audience by laughing gives approval to the altered form of the repressed or denied gratification. An additional measure of pleasure is gained through the saved expenditure of effort in the joke-work. One might put this in a different way by saying that there is additional pleasure in appreciating or admiring the clever way the joke achieves its purpose. This is also a saving of effort for the listener; he didn't have the work of creating the joke. Many aggressive jokes achieve a position of superiority over the target of the joke. Freud says,

"The pleasure in jokes has seemed to us to arise from an economy of expenditure upon inhibition, the pleasure in the comic from an economy in expenditure upon ideation . . . the pleasure from humor from an economy in expenditure on feeling."²²

We assume Freud means that jokes release repressed material kept in place by inhibition (repression); the comic is a pleasure of watching the bodily movements of a person clumsier than we are, and hence, something that does not involve

²² Sigmund Freud, p. 236.

superiority of thought but superior dexterity; humor occurs when a painful situation does not cause pain but amusement instead, hence, a conservation of affect (pain). At the end of Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, he says,

" . . . the euphoria which we endeavour to reach by these means is nothing other than the mood of a period of life in which we were accustomed to deal with our psychical work in general with a small expenditure of energy--the mood of our childhood, when we were ignorant of the comic, when we were incapable of jokes and when we had no need to humour to make us feel happy in our life.²³

It can be seen in the following analytic literature that most of the attention has been given to the economic perspective, or to the process and function of jokes. Relatively less attention has been paid to the structural features of jokes as symbolic productions with analyzable conscious and unconscious contents.

Freud's Structural Theory of Jokes. Freud deals with humor in the ending chapter of Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (1905) and also in his article "Humor"(1927). It is interesting to note that the final section of the book has some similarities to the article; Freud even uses the same joke to illustrate his point. Freud views humor as a situation in which human suffering (even, or especially, one's own) is not ultimately viewed as painful, but is amusing.

²³ Ibid.

This, Freud saw in "humor" (1927), as the effect of the superego comforting the ego in its pain; comfort is given through humor. The protagonist of the joke is made to feel restored. In this short article on humor in 1927, Freud is concerned with the structural theory and with an aspect of defense against suffering. However, all of Freud's thoughts on jokes are contained in the article, jokes are not mentioned again in the 1930 work. The article on humor contains only one structural analysis: the protective aspects of the superego comfort the ego in "gallows humor." Freud explores no other possibilities in jokes for other structural configurations. In the joke used, the superego is strong, kind, and protective, and the ego is in need and is responsive and able to be helped or healed. It is the position of this study that many other structural combinations exist in jokes, and that many other qualities or characteristics of ego and superego can be identified in jokes.

Jokes and Post-Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory. An article which is consistently based on psychoanalytic theory is "On Elephantasy and Elephanticide," by R. D. Abrahams.²⁴ This article contains no recommendations for treatment; it does not even mention treatment. The article examines "elephant jokes" from a point of view of psychoanalytic theory.²⁵ In terms of the definitions used

²⁴ R. D. Abrahams, "On Elephantasy and Elephanticide," Psychoanalytic Review, 1966, Vol. 56, pp. 225-241.

²⁵ Ibid.

in the present study, some of the jokes are not jokes, but instead are humorous riddles. The author says,

"Jokes perform a defensive function, denying the reality principle for the moment in favor of infantile word play and nonsense in which dangerous aggression can be projected into harmless situations . . . thereby serving the pleasure principle . . . allowing aggressive expression against something creating anxiety, by regressing to childish expression of wit."²⁶

Abraham's theoretical position is virtually identical to the one expressed by Freud in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. Abrahams says, "The joke is harmless aggression which provides a transitory gain for the ego in the jokes."²⁷ The use of the concept of ego and ego enhancement was not used by Freud in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious because he had not developed that part of the theory in 1905. This investigator agrees with Abrahams that the ego is involved; jokes are not merely a struggle between id and superego. The joke is (sometimes) a harmless aggression because it substitutes talk for actual violence. Abrahams is in total accord with Freud, also, in dealing with jokes entirely in terms of aggression and sexuality.

Abrahams gives this sample joke: A mother, father, and small son went to the zoo for an outing. At the elephant compound the little boy saw an elephant with an erection.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 235.

²⁷ Ibid.

He said, "What's that?" His mother, embarrassed, said, "Oh, never mind, it's nothing." The father said, "Son, I'm afraid your mother is pretty spoiled."²⁸

In analyzing this joke Abrahams goes beyond economic theory and interpretations of sexuality and aggression, and he brings in the concept of the "family romance." He sees the elephant as a parent vis-a-vis the child. Abrahams says,

"Looking at elephant jokes in terms of the family romance, one can see both facets of the standard ambivalence toward the father figure . . . fascination with an envy of the physical parts and powers; on the other hand, there is the Oedipal success story which requires that this archetypical rival be emasculated . . ."²⁹

As an example of the second part of this ambivalence, Abrahams offers this "joke" (riddle):

What did the elephant say when the alligator bit off his trunk."

(Nasally) "Very funny!"³⁰

In a chapter by Edith Jacobson, in her book, Depression, the laughter of children is discussed, but unlike many of the preceding authors, there are no recommendations for or against using humor in treatment. Jacobson is attempting to understand the development of humor or laughter in people by tracing its development in children. She has this to say about what she thinks is the basic status of knowledge prior to her work (1946):

²⁸Abrahams, p. 238.

²⁹Ibid, p. 239 .

"Freud initiated the discussion of this subject in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (1905), which considers mainly economic and topographical perspectives. Freud showed that laughter provoked by wit results from a saving of psychic expenditure due to a momentary lifting of inhibiting forces which permits a return to infantile pleasures. Later Freud and others called attention to the role of ego and superego in comical productions and in humor. Reik (1929) investigated the role of introjection and projection in Jewish jokes by comparing them with manic-depressive mechanisms. Freud (1927) interpreted humor as a spiteful triumph of narcissism and the pleasure principle over the miseries of life, effected by a momentary change of cathexis from the ego to the superego which, looking down from a bird's view, comforts the frightened ego as a father comforts a child in harmless trouble. Kris (1938) supplemented Freud's economic theory on laughter and wit by pointing to the importance of "the speed at which tension is relieved," to the "element of suddenness in this economic process (which) is responsible for the nature of comic pleasure."³⁰

Freud suggested that

"Most comic phenomena seem to be bound up with past conflicts of the ego, that they help it to repeat its victory and in doing so once more to overcome half assimilated fear."³¹

Through observation and analysis of adults, Jacobson concludes that small children laugh and have pleasure in the mastery of their bodies and that failure to master the body produces anxiety. Laughter is the result of the pleasurable absence of anxiety in relation to these mastered functions. That is, there is a memory of anxiety and a sense of relief. There is also a pleasurable sensation of safety which accompanies mastery. Jacobson says,

³⁰ Edith Jacobson, Depression, New York: Basic Books, 1972, p. 83.

³¹ Ibid.

"The original close relationship between laughter and motor experience paves the way for later stages in the development of laughter from a reaction to complex experiences in body mastery to, finally, a victory of the ego over the outer realistic, and the inner instinctual worlds."³²

This is a vital theoretical link in the concept of development. Since the ego becomes more involved in the experience, the ego begins to experience both anxiety and pleasure in the mastery of many functions. Safety and mastery produce pleasure and a diminution of anxiety. If this drop in anxiety is quick, laughter can be a consequence. Hence, laughter involves a victory for the ego.

Jacobson agrees with Freud about the relationship between the superego and ego in the production of humor: that the superego shelters the ego in certain times of failure, allowing the ego to borrow strength to reassert its "invulnerability." Jacobson thinks there is a continuum of complexity in laughter from the very simple laughter at motor skills that a child has, to the complex laughter of the adult using satire or irony.

Jacobson suggests that the element of feelings of superiority enter into laughter when the person realizes that he is safe and skillful and is observing someone who is not. Anxiety is aroused by the unskillful person and released pleurably through the realization of one's own superiority, safety, and skill.

³²Ibid., p. 87.

The article by Ernst Kris, referred to by Jacobson, is "Ego Development and the Comic."³³ Kris, like Jacobson, makes no recommendations for treatment. Kris is aware that Freud did not consider humor from a metapsychological point of view and he wishes to add some insight in that area. Kris agrees with Freud that

"the pleasure of wit originates from an economy of expenditure in inhibition, that of the comic from an economy of expenditure in thought and that of humor from an economy of expenditure in emotion."³⁴

Kris thinks that the element of suddenness in wit and jokes is responsible for comic pleasure. This occurs because of a rapid release of affect that was a relatively high level. This concept is in agreement with a more complex theory, discussed later, developed in the present study: the "punch line of the joke is a surprise, thus, evades the superego before the audience can defend or prepare; the audience, being fooled, is blameless. Kris is referring to the fact that a rapid discharge of affect has a pleasurable effect because of the great contrast.

Kris and Jacobson agree that comic pleasure is possible only when one feels safe. Kris extends this concept somewhat by saying that we can only laugh at someone from whom we feel relatively detached. If we are identified with the other person, his failures cannot be funny.

³³Ernst Kris, "Ego Development and the Comic," American Journal of Psychoanalysis, Vol. 19, pp. 77-90.

³⁴Ibid.

Kris and Jacobson say exactly the same thing about body mastery and ego mastery: one can laugh at a failure of another only if one has mastered that particular body or ego function, otherwise too much anxiety is produced. Kris says,

"Pleasure in mastery plays itself out in the present and is experienced as such. Comic pleasure refers to a past achievement of the ego which has required long practice . . . We experience not only the success . . . but the whole process by which we gradually attained this mastery."³⁵

In this regard it is interesting to note that both Kubie and Grotjahn think that the most proper use of humor in therapy is to reenforce already established insights into the unconscious, not to break new ground.

Kris, then, would see a conflict in the ego between anxiety and mastery in the production and enjoyment of the comic. Thus, humor can be a defense of the ego or can permit it to make permanent growth by reenforcing maturing insight.

Another writer who concerns himself with ego and superego issues is Richard Simon. His article, "Freud's Concept of Comedy and Suffering," deals with superego issues and is based largely on Freud's paper on "humor." Simon fully subscribes to the Freudian concept that in humor the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Richard Simon, "Freud's Concepts of Comedy and Suffering," Psychoanalytic Review, (Fall) 1977, Vol. 64, p. 391-407.

pain suffered by the ego in its failures is modified by the kind attention lent to it by the superego, which helps the ego regain a sense of worth and power.

Edmund Bergler has a different view of the role of the superego in humor. He finds Freud's article, "Humor," the poorest of all his writings.³⁷ Bergler sees the ego and superego engaged in a life long struggle and does not believe in the "protective" aspect of the superego. In his book Laughter and the Sense of Humor, Bergler wants to show that

"laughter is a necessary and healthy INTERNAL debunking process and it is a fear reducing process . . . not directed against external powers. . . Wit is a method of attacking . . . the inner conscience (ego ideal)."(sic)³⁸

He, like Kris, sees joking as a defense of the ego against the ego ideal. The ego ideal is a part of the superego that constantly torments the ego for failure to live up to the standards set by the ego idea. Just as a joke against the parent lowers the parent in the eyes of the child, a joke against the superego diminishes its power and prestige in the eyes of the ego. Bergler thinks all humor is to debunk authority of various kinds with the unconscious purpose of debunking the internal superego. This is part of the fight against what Bergler calls "psychic masochism." Psychic masochism occurs when the pain of

³⁷Edmund Bergler, Laughter and the Sense of Humor, New York: Intercontinental Medical Book Corporation, 1956.

³⁸Ibid, p. 17.

guilt in the ego (from not meeting goals of the ego ideal) is transformed into pleasure as a defense of the ego; however, this is also guilt producing and leads to an aggressive denial of masochism through hostile or aggressive acts, including laughter and joking. Bergler thinks that laughter has two functions: reducing the prestige of the superego, and aggressively denying masochism. A further device is to make the butt of the joke a target outside of the self to attract the superego away from the ego. The external targets are merely symbols or displacements; the important action is internal.

Bergler sees laughter in children as a developmental process beginning with the smile at the end of feeding; it comes with satiation and subsequent muscle relaxation and is reenforced by the mother's smile. The mother's smile means "I am not hungry, I won't eat you." The smile, therefore, equals safety. Another factor is the infant's omnipotence. Any defeat is transformed internally into the statement, in effect, "I was not defeated, I wanted this to happen." This preserves the feeling of omnipotence (but lays the ground work for masochism). Putting these two things together, the smile and masochism, produces a double weapon against defeat to the ego. A final stage of development in laughter is to ridicule adults and authorities;

this changes dangerous or unpleasant situations into safe and funny ones. Hence, ridicule of others helps re-establish self-esteem and omnipotence in the ego.

In the more mature person, understanding the riddle of a joke enhances self esteem. To know is reassuring; mastery is reassuring. Bergler thinks that the mastery of the riddle of jokes also means to children a mastery of secret adult knowledge of sexuality, and is, hence, forbidden knowledge. This means that at an unconscious level all joking is sexual and rebellious. Bergler says, "Every joke is on the superego."³⁹

In his book Bergler quotes many aphorisms, riddles, and witty remarks. He, like many others, tends to blur distinctions between various kinds of jokes. Although Bergler says all jokes are directed against the superego, this seems unlikely. The present study will examine this point in some depth. Jokes may be directed at various parts of the psychic structure and not just the superego. Bergler himself quotes an aphorism that seems to be attacking the id, not the superego. (In regard to sex), "the position is ridiculous, the pleasure momentary, the expense damnable."⁴⁰

Martin Grotjahn recapitulates Freud's work on wit and is in agreement with part of Freud's findings. Grotjahn,

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

however, stresses that the purpose of the joke is the guilt free expression of aggressive wishes whereas Freud thought that wit gratified sexual or aggressive wishes. Grotjahn thinks that even jokes with a sexual theme are actually aggressive jokes in disguise. He apparently does not agree that jokes can express sexuality. This is a major differentiation that he passes over without emphasis in his book Beyond Laughter.⁴¹

Grotjahn refers to Freud's paper on humor and is in agreement with the concept that humor represents the protective and healing support that the superego can give to the ego in a time of suffering. He is in agreement with Kris and Jacobson in his concept of anxiety and laughter. He says,

"Laughter is based on previously mastered anxiety . . . it helps to repeat the victory, and in so doing to overcome residual anxiety which is not quite assimilated."⁴²

Summary. Of all the articles and books reviewed, only a few deal specifically with jokes and the structural psychoanalytic theory. Freud in his article on humor applies structural theory in only one way in an examination of "gallows humor." He concludes that the superego can be a comforting agency to the ego. Simon agrees with Freud and says essentially the same thing.

⁴¹ Martin Grotjahn, Beyond Laughter, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957.

⁴² Ibid., p. 192.

Edmund Bergler has an opposite view inasmuch as he views the superego as consistently and forcefully antagonistic to the ego. Bergler sees jokes only as a weapon used against the superego and as a way to enhance the ego in its perpetual struggle with the superego.

Abrahams makes a contribution to the structural theory by examining a joke that contains the theme of the "family romance," a structural and oedipal concept.

Kris, Jacobson, and Grotjahn all see jokes as containing themes which make possible the reinforcement of ego skills and ego mastery. Jokes can reaffirm previously mastered ego functions, hence, they can promote or defend the ego.

Theoretical Framework

The psychoanalytic theory is used. Since the theory is not completely codified in all of its aspects, part of the task is to choose those parts of the theory that apply best. The theory is added to by the study, when this is supported by the study findings.

Research Design

The structural theory is psychoanalysis is the focus of the study within the general assumptions and context of the Freudian and Post-Freudian theory of personality. The following is the particular synthesis and condensation of theory that is used in this study.

Sigmund Freud's The Ego and the Id was published in 1923 and was the last of his major theoretical works; it completed the tripartite psychoanalytic theory of economic, topographic, and structural concepts. The theory also includes the theory of instincts, sexual and aggressive, and the theory of the pleasure principle and the reality principle.

The psychic structure is (metaphorically speaking) divided into conscious, preconscious, and unconscious parts. The pre-conscious is that material that is not presently in the conscious mind but can be brought into mind at will; the unconscious is that part that cannot be brought into the conscious mind except by unusual circumstances, like psychoanalysis. The id, ego, and superego have conscious, preconscious, and unconscious parts. The id is divided between the two basic instincts: sexual and aggressive. The ego and superego have their development partly through the agency of the demands of the Reality Principle.

Freud, in his early concepts, as found in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900) and Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (1905) saw the mind as having a part that wanted instinctual gratification and a part that denied gratification. In Freud's view both jokes and dreams are attempts by a part of the mind to achieve some kind of

gratification of repressed wishes. Both the "joke work" and the "dream work" were seen as creative compromises in the struggle between the repressing forces and the repressed urges. In the early view of joke work, the sexual and aggressive urges were seen as seeking a way around the prohibitions of the repressing forces. If the term "superego" had been developed in 1905, it might have been possible to say that "the id seeks a way to circumvent the superego." And, this might be a simplification of one of the major points of Freud's book on jokes, put in terms of structural theory.

After Freud's work in 1923 the concept of the ego was extended by Anna Freud, Kris, Jacobson, and others. Work was done on understanding the defenses of the ego as well.

The ego is a complicated array of functions in the psychic structure. A contribution of ego psychology, as a part of psychoanalytic theory, can be briefly described as follows: the ego is a collection of adaptational skills, both conscious and unconscious, which participate in regulating the psychic structure and permit gratification of instinctual urges within the confines of reality and superego requirements. The ego has potentials for mastery which appear in developmental sequence (anlage).

The adaptational skills of the ego can be not only conscious and unconscious, but can also be more or less

successful. Hence, a neurotic symptom, for example, is seen as an ego function even though it is pathological. This is because the symptom is an attempt at mastery and an attempt to mediate within the psychic structure. The fact that the attempt is a partial failure does not mean that it is centered in the id or superego. It is also true that symptoms are adaptations of greater or lesser pathology. A neurotic condition, for example, is usually a better adaptation than a psychotic state.

Several other categories of functions are found to be part of the ego even though they are not all examples of complete or perfect mastery or mediation. They are: defenses of the ego, character traits, neuroses, psychoses, and character pathologies.

Thus, we can summarize by saying that completely successful ego functions can be identified, plus another array of ego functions that represent only partial mastery or success, but can be seen, nevertheless, as being centered in the ego. The ego, then, like the superego, is complex.

The major limitation of theoretical research of this kind is that the findings can be disputed on the basis of their reliability, due to the subjective nature of the method of analysis. This is the same problem encountered

in most psychoanalytic writing. For example in Freud's research on the case of "Dora," Erikson later criticized Freud for not understanding the case. Erikson used the same data as presented by Freud, but presented a different interpretation.

The major advantage of this method is that the scope of the investigation provides an opportunity for a synthesis of a number of complex and diverse elements. The synthesis of diverse elements, with the attendant heuristic and mnemonic values, can offer the possibility of creating a useful clinical theory.

This study will bring together a number of psychoanalytic formulations in an attempt to offer a new synthesis of theory with particular reference to understanding jokes. This process can respond to certain questions raised or implied in the literature.

Research Questions. The analysis of jokes from a Post-Freudian, structural point of view can deal with several questions already raised or implied: Is there more psychological content in jokes than just sexual and/or aggressive wishes? Is the superego always defeated in a joke? Is the superego ever protective? Is the struggle always between id and superego? Is the ego enhanced by some jokes? What are the various combinations and directions of force between id and ego and superego?

In regard to the question of the reliability of this kind of theoretical research, another issue is important: Can research of this kind suggest a method of analysis which is useful even if some of the particular findings of the analysis or alternative analyses suggested could be disputed? Or to put it another way: this study does develop and suggest a way to analyze jokes that it is hoped will be useful in analyzing all jokes, even though one might not always agree with all of the particular findings of every interpreter on every joke.

Variables Investigated. Certain elements in the narrative of jokes will be identified, using the Economic, Topographical, and Structural aspects of the psycho-analytic theory: (1) Elements in the narrative indicating the symbolic presence of the Id, and its gratification or lack of gratification; this will include sexual and aggressive drives. (2) Presence or absence of symbolic representations of the superego in its various forms, old and new, healthy and unhealthy, conscious and unconscious, strong or weak, complete or incomplete. (3) Presence or absence of symbolic representation of various aspects of both conscious and unconscious ego. This is a more varied category and includes all of the recognized functions of the ego, which include: defenses, symptoms, skills, character traits, etc. Ego will be identified in its healthy and unhealthy aspects as well. (4) Motivations of the story

are identified. (5) Gratifications are identified, especially as they relate to various parts of the psychic structure. (6) Aspects of the Pleasure Principle and the Reality Principle are identified when appropriate.

It is to be noted that every joke examined does not contain elements of every category.

Sampling. The unit of observation of this study is jokes. Jokes were collected from any available source, including patients in treatment. The jokes derive from the oral culture of the United States; no attempt was made to search out jokes in books or periodicals, but rather to collect the jokes that circulate through the oral network. The narrative content of jokes is scrutinized in terms of psychoanalytic theory as it is applied to patients in treatment, novels, art work, plays, dreams, fantasies, stories, legends, etc. There is a tradition in psychoanalysis for this kind of investigation from Freud and others. No attempt was made in this study to selectively sample jokes from various "categories," as no systematic joke categories exist to date. Following the method of Freud, Reik, Bergler, and others, the jokes selected in this study were chosen because they seem to contain some important meaning. Many jokes were rejected because they were thought to be unimportant or redundant. Since there are literally tens of thousands

of jokes circulating in the oral culture of America, this selection is, at least in part, a practical matter. In addition, it must be acknowledged that the jokes that appear in this study are screened for meaning and appropriateness and that this represents the ideas of the researcher. It is an identical situation to that faced by Freud and Reik. Reik says in Jewish Wit,

"Another determining factor in emphasizing certain witticisms and putting others in the background was the question of their psychological significance. Some jokes are a rich source of insights into the emotional and mental life of the people who produce them, while others yield less fruitful results. It should not be denied⁴³ that a personal factor operates in this choice.

A conscientious effort was made to locate jokes which respond to the research.

Methodology. The subject of the study is the content of the narrative of the joke, including the humorous twist at the conclusion. The study analyzes this content to achieve insight into its unconscious and/or conscious meaning in terms of the structural theory of psychoanalysis and to postulate or build further psychoanalytic theory from these insights. The narrative or story is approached seriously as though it were in a novel, dream, or play and the elements of the story will be summarized. The actors in the narrative are examined to determine their probable characters, emotions, motivations, etc. from both a conscious,

⁴³Theodore Reik, Jewish Wit, New York: Gamut Press, 1963, p. 182.

rational viewpoint, and also, from an unconscious viewpoint which is informed by psychoanalytic theories.

Freud, in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, analyzed jokes from an economic and topographical point of view only, inasmuch as he had not developed the structural part of the theory at that time. This study will include an analysis of jokes from the economic viewpoint developed by Freud. The study will then analyze the jokes further in terms of structural theory.

The work of Freud and others, while very important and illuminating, tended to be satisfied with the conclusion that jokes expressed sexual and aggressive drives, and the interest in jokes seems to stop there. It is the intent of this study to show that a much richer body of information about the unconscious can be gained from the study of jokes and that further theory and generalization can be made.

This study assumes that psychoanalytic theory is not completely consistent and codified. There are many areas of disagreement both gross and subtle. It is not the purpose of this study to render all psychoanalytic theory internally consistent and proven. The task would be much too vast an undertaking. Rather, the method used here will be to select those parts of the theory that seem to fit the circumstances under study and then to integrate them into a usable theory for understanding jokes, suggesting new theoretical formulations

if they are appropriate, or suggesting useful syntheses of recognized parts of the psychoanalytic theory.

The psychoanalytic theory is taken from the standard literature, such writers, as: Sigmund Freud, Ann Freud, Otto Fenichel, Martin Grotjahn, Ralph Greenson, and others. Freud viewed psychoanalysis as a treatment technique, a theory of personality, and as a research method. Of the three, Freud thought that the use of psychoanalysis as a research method was its most important function. A basic technique that Freud used to discover data was "free association," that is, merely putting thought into words, but thought in which nothing is left out; and all the thoughts contribute to an understanding of the mind of the person, not just the edited or arranged thoughts. Thoughts are basic data of psychoanalytic research. This includes thoughts in their developed, elaborated form found in dreams, novels, plays, jokes, poems, etc. or the unelaborated, unorganized stream of thoughts in the psychoanalysis of a patient. Freud was, of course, also attentive to the actions of people, but not from a sociological or phenomenological point of view. Freud's point of observation was from "inside" the person, and hence, actions were important in their symbolic and personal meaning and what they demonstrated about the thoughts and feelings of the person. The feelings of the person are a major interest in psychoanalysis, however, the feelings

must be named and thought about to become data which can be apprehended and studied by the researcher. Freud studied the entire intellectual and emotional experience of the person from an individual and internal perspective.

The present study focuses on the narrative content of jokes, which may be seen as elaborated or creatively arranged thoughts, presumably expressing various emotions and states of mind. This procedure is traditional in psychoanalytic study and writing; for example, Freud analyzed his own dreams to build theory in The Interpretation of Dreams, and it was in this work where he analyzed Hamlet and Oedipus Rex.

Psychoanalytic research and writing have traditionally had a method of examining clinical and non-clinical data. The data is subjected to logical and deductive review in terms of the current psychoanalytic theory, citations are made to theory and other writers, and a new or synthesized view of the data is offered. Subsequently, other writers confirm or deny the findings and present their own amended views. The clinical data is usually from patients in treatment and contains the associations, history, and situation of the patient. However, non-clinical data, from plays, novels, jokes, and so on, is also analyzed, but usually only in terms of psychoanalytic theory, by the deductions of the investigator.

The main emphasis of this study is on jokes, which are analyzed in this non-clinical fashion. The psychoanalytic theory used is selected mostly from writers that are currently recognized as authoritative contributors. The theory which best seems to explain the data is utilized; the most appropriate synthesis is developed out of the available body of theory. New theory is advanced in this study as needed to render a complete view of the subject. The psychoanalytic theories used are what would be seen as "Freudian" or "neo-Freudian" in large measure, although aspects of Ego Psychology, Kleinian theory, and others could be appropriate to some degree.

In this study a series of jokes are examined from the point of view of psychoanalytic theory, but without using information about the actual thoughts, defenses, drives, motives, or personality of the author of the joke or of the audience to the joke. This kind of analysis, it must be acknowledged, represents my own view of the meaning of the jokes, but, one hopes, will be understood in large part by others. It is certainly true that other interpretations will be possible; however, an attempt is made to make certain, what might be termed, "universal" meanings clear in these jokes.

Universal meaning is present in jokes, plays, movies, novels, and other works of fiction. There is generally a

consensually validated body of meaning consciously perceived in these works. For example, in a simple fable, a wise old man, a pretty girl, a policeman, a mother, and other characters are recognized similarly by most people. Most people will tend to have the same idea about the nature of the story also.

The work of Freud and others showed that the consensually validated meaning of a play, novel, or joke was on the surface of consciousness and available to everyone, but there was also an unconscious level to appreciate and understand. The understanding of the unconscious level is what is valuable to the clinician and is made accessible through the use of an appropriate theory.

A work of fiction is fashioned to communicate meaning, as opposed to the dream which is designed to hide meaning. Because of Freud's work we now know that the dream has meaning but that it is unconscious; the surface of the dream is often nonsense, but the analyzed dream is very coherent. The symbols of the dream are not universal but highly personal or eccentric, and the meaning is discovered through free association; hence, we can never be sure of the meaning of a dream without the associations of the dreamer. We can, however, often guess at the meaning of dreams or come close to the meaning by virtue of the fact that dream symbols do

have some similarity from one person to another. But, we are never positive. The well analyzed person who is familiar with the true meaning of his own dreams is much more likely to understand the dreams of another person, having learned the grammar of his own.

The same must be true for works of fiction. We cannot be positive that we understand the total intention of the author in his unconscious thought and communication, but we can make guesses based on shared human symbols and experiences.

In this study, therefore, I wish to analyze jokes as a way to deepen understanding of various possibilities of meaning, to seek, in effect, the universal unconscious meanings. The caveat remains: we cannot be positive of the experience of the joke, author, teller, or audience without attention to the specific thoughts, drives, defenses, and character of that person. However, as with dreams, or even better than with dreams, due to strong cultural and conscious features of jokes, we can make sophisticated guesses and predictions. It is hoped that by pointing out these meanings or by suggesting that various meanings are there to be discovered by a similar analytic process, one will become more attuned and open to the meanings and their potential usefulness in clinical practice.

Analysis of the Jokes

In this examination of jokes to find symbolic representations of id, ego, and superego, the jokes and the analysis of them are focused on a number of issues, each of which is considered in the analysis of each joke. The issues considered are: (1) Aspects of the id: aggressive or sexual drives, which Freud said are in every joke. These are briefly noted in each joke. (2) Aspects of the superego are noted in the jokes and the diversity of characteristics of the superego representations are identified. Various aspects of the superego are named. (3) Aspects of the ego and its diverse functions are noted and specific ego functions such as: defense, adaptation, growth, and symptom formation are identified. (4) The dynamic struggle or interaction between id, ego, and superego is noted, especially with reference to the outcome of this struggle. It should be made clear that some elements of id, ego, and superego are in nearly every joke and that every joke can illustrate all the parts of the psychic structure if fully and exhaustively analyzed; however, it is possible to find jokes that appear to emphasize certain themes and have secondary themes or qualities as well.

When jokes are found to have more than one theme, and to have themes of greater or lesser importance, it is then possible to extend the Freudian theory without needing to contradict it. That is, since Freud thought all jokes have sexual and/or aggressive drive satisfaction as a purpose or theme, it would seem to contradict Freud to assert that other themes have primary importance. A way to preserve the Freudian theory is found in the concept of emphasis in the themes in the narrative of jokes. A joke may have a theme or goal of sexual and/or aggressive drive satisfaction and, at the same time, have other themes in the narrative of the joke. Jokes can be found in which the sexual and aggressive elements are emphasized or primary, and other jokes can be found in which these elements are present but only as secondary or minor themes. The Freudian theory would only be contradicted if one found it necessary to assert that sexual and aggressive drive satisfaction is the only significant element in jokes, and

that no other psychological material is present. Freud was not of that view himself, as evidenced by his article on humor, which has previously been discussed in which other purposes were found.

If some themes of sexual and/or aggressive drive satisfaction can found in all jokes, even if in the particular jokes this theme is minor, then the Freudian theory will not be contradicted in its essential meaning and value. However, if it is found that other themes have greater emphasis or importance in some particular jokes, then one would not wish to assert that the sexual and aggressive themes offer the entire psychological insight found in jokes.

In The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud discussed the presence of products and parts of the mind mostly in terms of urges of the instincts. The instinctual drives were seen to be achieving symbolic representation in dreams.

This is also implied in the work on jokes but in a rather more conscious way. In the joke work, prohibited sexual or aggressive wishes were thought to be variously represented and gratified in the joke, and the joke teller and the audience colluded to make this content acceptable by consensus.

What is being examined in this present study is a more complex issue: the possibility of symbolic representation in jokes of more aspects of the psychic content and structure than simply suppressed drives interacting with forces of inhibition. The implication in Freud, which is confirmed by Bergler, Reik, and others; is that the suppressed drives always seek to circumvent the repressing forces. That is to say, in terms of structural theory, that in a joke the id always tries to "win" over the superego. The following joke does not fit that description; it also serves as an example of the complexity of the superego. The superego is not just one entity and can be represented in different ways in jokes. That is to say, certain jokes take as their theme the archaic parts of the superego, that part of the superego that is often unconscious or partly so, and which has the punitive, puritanical quality of an avenging scourge. Freud referred to this quality as the talion principle (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, burning for burning.) In the

archaic part of the superego, the punishment usually exceeds the crime. In the Moslem world, for example, we understand that stealing is punished by cutting off the hand of the thief. This is a cruel and savage punishment by Western standards and the standards of the mature and conscious superego. And yet, in the unconscious part of the superego of many of us, there are vestiges of a similar force. These superego qualities can be seen in an analysis, in dreams, and in jokes and stories. There is a coarse sexual joke that illustrates this primitive quality.

Joke: The highway patrol is called to the scene of an automobile crash. There they find some badly wrecked cars with broken glass everywhere. A young man is frantically searching in the darkness and wreckage. The police ask him what he is doing, and he says that he is searching for his girl friend's head. The police try to reason with him by saying that it is no use to look for her head because if it is missing she must be dead. He replies, "Yes, I know, but my penis is in it."

Analysis: This is called a "sick joke." It does seem to symbolize however, the force of the archaic superego. The sexual activity (fellatio) is punished by death for the girl and castration for the man. Using Freud's economic concepts, we could also say that the joke

gives expression to both sexual and aggressive impulses. The main thrust of this story is that sexual activity is fiendishly punished with decapitation and castration; this would be a most savage and harsh punishment. The listener is encouraged to be in the position of the superego rather than the position of the protagonist. The defense required to find this joke "funny" is Identification With the Aggressor; identification with the victims would make one wince with pain, which is the outstanding quality of a sick joke. In this joke about the car wreck, the listener identifies with the superego to avoid the anxiety of being identified with the actors in the story. The policeman in the joke seems to be, contrary to tradition, not a superego figure but symbolizes an aspect or quality of ego. He says the practical thing, i.e., the girl is dead if the head is gone. There is no judgment of wrongdoing. The policeman is reality centered in his statement, not judgmental.

This joke is similar to many fairy stories in which the wicked are punished horribly and the virtuous are rewarded lavishly. Many children's stories have a "moral" and presumably were invented to teach correct values and behavior. This joke is one in which the superego "wins" and the id forces are punished; hence, the outcome of the struggle can be noted. The joke illustrates the symbolic

or implied presence of an archaic part to the superego and also demonstrates the value or wisdom of certain ego defenses. The gratification of moralistic aggressive drives is possible only by identification with the position of the superego; the sexual drives are harshly rebuked and seen as inferior. In a complex view of the psychic structure the superego has various facets or divisions, the archaic parts and "other" parts, which will be listed further on in the discussion.

The following joke shows a theme of superego that is, in a sense, the opposite of the harsh, powerful, and cruel quality just seen.

Joke: A very naive young girl went on her first date with a man. Even though she was 20 years old, her mother had sheltered and controlled her so much that this was the first time she had been permitted to go out alone on a date. Her mother had protected her from all information about sex. When she came home quite late that night, her mother asked her what had happened and what the man was like. The girl said that the man behaved pretty much the way her mother had said he would. Therefore, she had used the tactics her mother suggested and had said to the man at one point in the evening, "Please don't get on top of me, it would worry my mother too much." The girl went on to say that the man was very nice about it, and had

worked out the problem and they both had a very good time. The man had said, "That's o.k. You get on top of me, and we'll worry my mother instead."

Analysis: This joke has a strong sexual theme, and a theme of aggression against the controlling mother, the dumb girl, and the tricky seducer. The audience can look down on all three characters and at the same time enjoy the sexual fantasy and the aggressive fantasy.

The mother represents the over-strict superego who is overthrown by the clever man. The superego here is an object of ridicule and is not strong or dangerous. At first glance, the man seems to represent the id, however, a more complete concept would be that the id components of the man and girl are combined with the conscious ego functions of the man and presumably, the unconscious ego of the girl to successfully challenge this superego mother. The girl represents certain unconscious mechanisms that ally themselves with the id to produce gratification. We see then an outcome to the struggle between the forces of id, ego, and superego in which the id and ego forces combine to defeat a rather weak superego. This highlights certain ego mechanisms. Since no one could be as naive as the girl appears to be, it suggests the use of rationalization, repression, and denial (defenses) with the girl emerging in the role of the classic hysteric (adaptation

in form of symptom). In hysteria the repressed urge can return to the behavior without conscious awareness of the meaning of the behavior, as in this joke.

In this joke we can identify several elements of ego and one aspect of superego. This joke is one in which the id and ego "win" against the superego. The joke is told from the point of view of gratification rather than inhibition. The superego quality here is one of strict rules, however, the superego is ridiculously ineffectual; there seems to be ridicule of the weakness of it and the futility of its struggle to repress. This joke seems to conform more nearly to Freud's hypothesis that the joke work successfully gets around forces of inhibition.

The ego qualities are varied. In the man we can identify various ego qualities of deception, manipulation, and rationalization; these are conscious ego functions. In the girl we see some unconscious ego functions: denial, rationalization, repression, and the constellation of adaptations subsumed under the diagnosis of "Hysteria." The presence of the id is both conscious, in the man, and unconscious in the girl.

In the next joke there are three attitudes suggested with reference to a superego concern. The three attitudes are increasingly permissive, and the joke can be viewed as a recommendation that the superego be modified toward

a less and less punitive position. The superego position is conscious.

Joke: Three Frenchmen were discussing the concept of "savoir-faire" (literally a combination of the verbs "to know how" and "to do") and proposing and disputing the exact definition of the essence of this quality. The first man gave the following illustration or example, "Suppose one comes home to find one's wife in bed with a man, and instead of becoming angry and combative one merely leaves to avoid a scene. That, I contend, is "savoir-faire." The second man said that the definition was good but could be improved. If, in the same circumstances, one not only didn't make a fuss, but also said, "Bonjour, continuez" and shut the door before one left, that would demonstrate "savoir-faire." The third man felt he had the best definition when he said that with these circumstances, if the wife and man did, indeed, "continuez" that would be "savoir-faire."

Analysis: In this joke anxiety is created in that the superego will take a punitive position vis-a-vis the errant wife and her lover. The three Frenchmen and their definitions have an ameliorating effect on the superego position. The definitions proposed by the first two are rather comfortable in terms of lowering the panic of the situation but have the tentative or inhibited quality of

persons only half convinced. The third man makes a vivid contrast and shows what he thinks real lack of guilt and fear would be like, and illustrates absolute mastery over guilt.

Savoir-faire, then, begins to take on a meaning that it represents freedom from guilt, or independence from the opinion of the superego. Savoir-faire could be seen as an alliance between id and ego which "wins" against the superego by converting it to a more and more accepting agency. This is an unusual view inasmuch as the superego is converted and mastered rather than duped, smashed, fooled, etc. The sexual aspect of this joke is obvious and the aggressive one is implied, that is, one is, at first, led to think about the fact that the usual outcome of this kind of confrontation is violence. The humor comes partly from a rejection of the violence. However, violence, can be appreciated, in fantasy, at the start of the joke. The joke shows aspects of ego mastery over violence through understanding, experience, and tolerance. What could be a matter for the archaic superego becomes partly a matter of ego. There seems to be no defenses of the ego as such (like denial or rationalization) but rather an integration of reality and a mature channeling of impulses.

The following jokes illustrate various techniques for challenging the superego and also illustrate several ego functions.

Joke: An army sergeant was teaching close order drill to a group of recruits with whom he was not yet well acquainted. He explained to them how to "count off in fours," that is, the first man in the rank says "one," the second man says "two," the third man says "three," and so on. The sergeant gave the order to "count off" and the first man in the rank said "one" in a very "gay" voice. The sergeant stopped the company, who have by now counted out more numbers, and said to the first man, in an angry voice, "Say, are you "one?" The man answered, again in a very "gay" voice, "Yes, Sergeant, are you "one," too?"

Analysis: The sexual content is the homosexual advance of the soldier to the sergeant. The aggressive element is found in the audience to the joke who would be in a superior and hostile (looking down on) position to both the soldier and the sergeant. One can feel superior to the soldier because he is homosexual and superior to the sergeant because he is placed in an embarrassing, ridiculous position. In this joke the sergeant is a superego figure, the soldier is an id plus ego figure. The wit of the soldier who gets "one-up" with

the sergeant in repartee suggests an ego function. The rebelliousness of the homosexual soldier against the superego is awesome; he dares to be openly homosexual in a very "macho" environment and with a very imposing superego person. The superego is ridiculed and challenged in the most extreme way. This kind of joke seeks to overthrow the superego (outcome). The superego is stripped of its usual majesty and power; it is belittled. There is a daring and bravado here. The mistake the soldier makes about the sergeant's meaning results from the ego functions of forgetting and error. It attempts to achieve gratification of a need, and is akin to fantasy gratification. It is very unrealistic and ultimately unsuccessful. This is an outcome of failure for the ego. This occurs after the joke is over and the sergeant "gets" the soldier.

Another joke with a similar direct challenge toward the superego follows:

Joke: The brother was having sex with his sister and said "You are a better lay than Mom." The sister replied, "Dad says so, too."

Analysis: The incestuous sexual gratification here is obvious. What stands out in this joke structurally is the powerful contemptuous sweeping away of any restraint. It portrays a superego totally vanquished by collaboration

between id forces and the ego. This is a different superego than Freud often referred to, the awe inspiring, terrifying, force of guilt. This superego is completely committed to self-gratification and hedonism, and is correspondingly without aggression, guilt, moral standards, or limits of tolerance; it is in effect absent.

The cleverness of the ego function in producing this tightly woven joke has a tendency to validate the activity of the four people in a way that merely stating their activities would not do. The fact that it is a clever joke makes it more acceptable, or less repulsive. This was described by Freud as a saving of psychic energy through a saving of thought. There is considerable aggression against the superego. In terms of ego function, mastery, or defense, this joke is outstanding in having lots of id and little or no ego. There is, for example, no attempt at denial, rationalization, repression, or projection. There is basically pure gratification and both ego and superego are swept away. The actors care little about the practical consequences (ego) or the morality (superego). The outcome is victory for the id. As an adaptation to life the characters behave sociopathically.

Another joke that illustrates this attitude toward the superego follows. Here the emphasis is similar, but with some variations:

Joke: A hillbilly was visiting another hillbilly friend, and they were sitting in front of the cabin, talking, when the guest noticed one of the man's hound dogs. The dog was lying down, curled up and was licking its own penis. The guest said, "Look at that, ain't that something. Boy, I wish I could do that." The dog's owner thought it over a minute and said, "Well, it's okay with me, but don't you think you should pet him a little first?"

Analysis: This joke has the usual sexual and aggressive themes. The audience can certainly take a hostile (superior) attitude toward the hillbillies, since they display very low class habits. The joke also illustrates an outrageous position vis-a-vis the superego. The dog owner thinks that the guest wants to lick the dog's penis. The owner is a superego figure in this instance. He owns the dog, he owns the house, he is in charge. He does not forbid the activity. His nonchalance is an indication of a total lack of superego restraint. When he advises that the dog be petted first, this comes from the position of the ego not the superego. That is, the dog should be petted as a matter of procedure or as a way to put the dog in a good mood, not for moral reasons. There is no condemnation at all, only a practical thought from the ego of how to accomplish the desire.

From the point of view of the guest, of course, there is a misunderstanding. The guest wanted to be able to lick his own penis. Again, there is no interference from the completely overwhelmed superego. The desire of the guest is an auto-erotic or narcissistic one. And from the position of the guest, the joke focuses on very archaic sexual wishes. In terms of the outcome of the struggle between id, ego, and superego, the id and the ego win, and the superego loses. The sexual wish can potentially be gratified and ego skills are employed to this end., i. e., pet the dog first. It would seem that ego mastery and the reality principle are involved and there is no particular role for defenses of the ego. The superego is either missing or (by implication) very weak.

We can identify several styles of superego in these preceding jokes and several suggested methods to overcome the inhibition of the superego. In the army joke, the superego representation is strong, conventional, and conscious; the rebellion against the superego is outrageous and reckless. Part of the humor is an appreciation of the consequences which may come to the rebellious soldier.

In the incest joke, the attitude of the superego is not exactly expressed. However, the attitude of the ego is totally unconcerned about punishment because it has identified with a superego without standards or limits.

This might be seen as a joke symbolizing absence of the superego or the presence of a weak or incomplete superego overwhelmed by id forces, and therefore incapable of moral consciousness. Conscious, healthy superego as a positive and needed force in society is missing, and this can be seen as pathological or, in an older psychoanalytic nosology, as psychopathic. This is a different pathological state than the presence of unconscious, neurotic, archaic superego.

In the hillbilly joke, also, the superego is weak or missing. This joke escalates the power of the id inasmuch as the first hillbilly only wants to lick his own penis, but the misunderstanding offers permission for an even more forbidden activity. Surpassing narcissistic urges, it permits deeper regression and acting-out; a man is allowed to regress to sub-human levels and reverse his superior relationship to an animal by licking the latter's genitals. The suggestion accepts as "normal" a regression to borderline behavior.

In terms of ego considerations, homosexuality, sibling incest, and bestiality (perversion) are all pathological adaptations of the ego. These adaptations involve the defense of acting out and the repression of the real identity of the original instinctual objects; this is an unconscious function of the ego. Freud viewed perversion as the inverse

of neurosis in which the repressed sexual wishes are gratified through substitute objects, and the perversion is produced rather than neurotic symptoms and anxiety. The destructive power of the superego is denied, as is illustrated in the superego figures described above.

The following is another joke that can be seen from the point of view of overcoming superego, and can also be analyzed from the point of view of the id and the ego.

Joke: A new person moves into the neighborhood. She is a woman past middle age but not yet elderly. She lives alone and the neighbors have some curiosity about her. After she has lived in the house for awhile, the neighbors notice that a stream of handsome young men are seen entering and leaving her home at various times of the day and night. This continues for some time and one of the more curious and bold of the neighbors visits to find out what she can. After some general conversation, she finally comes right out and asks what is going on, why do the young men come and go from the house? The lady replies, "I guess it won't hurt to tell you. When I was very young and naive, I gave it away, when I got older and more sophisticated, I sold it. Now, I am buying it back."

Analysis: This joke also pushes back against the superego. There is some assertion of the right of older

women to have a sexual life. This story glorifies the ego and maturity, if we take the position that the woman is meeting her sexual needs in a logical or reality based way. The superego is overcome and the pragmatic and practical aspects are emphasized. The outcome of a struggle between id, ego, and superego is that the id drives (sexual) plus the activities of the ego modify the superego and allow gratification to take place. Rather extensive superego change is necessary. There are no apparent ego defenses involved, unless one considers rationalization and acting out to be suggested or implied. If the adaptation is considered practical and of no harm to anyone, then the major emphasis would be on the practical aspect of the ego as an instrument of mastery and adaptation. The neighbor is a potential superego figure. This joke conforms very well to Freud's idea that the sexual gratification is acceptable if the audience to the joke will lend its moral acceptance, by laughing. This is discussed more fully later.

The following joke contains a representation of the archaic superego, but is different from the pattern discussed by Freud. In this joke the defeat of the superego to gratify the instincts is not the main purpose, but rather it is the ridicule of the superego per se. The satisfaction of aggression seems to be, by comparison, rather secondary.

Joke: A young man and woman become engaged and then married after only a very short acquaintance. They know very little about one another, but are attracted, marry, and go on their honeymoon. While on their honeymoon at a dude ranch, they are out riding horseback one morning when the husband's horse begins to buck and behave stubbornly. The husband dismounts and taking the horse by the bridle, says to the horse, "That's one." He remounts the horse and continues the ride. A little later the horse once more becomes recalcitrant and misbehaves. The husband once more dismounts. This time he says to the horse, "That's two." He remounts and the ride continues. On the third occasion of the horse being difficult to manage, the husband dismounts, draws a pistol and shoots the horse dead. The wife at this point is shocked and angered by his behavior and says to him, "What a terrible, cruel thing to do, how could you?" The husband looks at her levelly and says, "That's one."

Analysis: We can conceive of the husband as a symbolic representation of the archaic punitive superego. The wife in the joke has an urge to rebel and overthrow him. His behavior is outrageously punitive and can be seen as such by the wife and the listener to the joke; hence rebellion is ego syntonic to the wife and satisfying to the listener. The husband is a figure of ridicule, and

if the threat from him does not seem serious, the audience can enjoy contempt of him. It seems that the major thrust of the joke is to be ridicule of the archaic superego. This can be contrasted to the joke about the headless girl, where great harm was done to the protagonist. In this case, the terrible punishment is not a fait accompli, unless one identifies with the horse. There is a strong aggressive theme in the death of the horse and the imagined death of the wife. The audience can feel aggressively superior to the husband. The outcome of the struggle between id, ego, and superego is not resolved by the end of the joke. The archaic superego (husband) is allied with the id (killing the horse). The wife, by protesting, sounds like ego or a more mature superego; her fate is not clear except by extrapolation. The ego functions and defenses are not prominent in this joke, but rather, it seems to be a clash between archaic superego plus id forces versus a more moderate voice, which is like ego or mature superego.

In the next joke we can identify a theme that corresponds to part of the psychoanalytic theory of the superego. There are circumstances in which aspects of the superego combine with the id. The basic theory is that the superego uses the aggressive instincts of the id to provide the power and harshness of the archaic

superego, and the superego uses the sexual instincts to provide the energy for protective and affirmative functions. There are also adaptations in which the superego is corrupted, and sexualized, as in some sado-masochistic situations. In the obsessional states, there is occasional alliance between the superego and the id.

Joke: In a Nevada bordello several of the prostitutes noticed that a new girl rapidly became very popular with the customers. One of the prostitutes wanted to know why she was so liked and asked one of the customers for his opinion. "Oh, that is easy to answer," he said, "she used to be a school teacher, and she makes you do it over and over until you get it right."

Analysis: This joke, from a structural viewpoint, illustrates a situation found in some neurotic conflicts, often in obsessional states, the alliance between the id and the superego. The teacher is a superego personification. She, as with the stereotype of teacher, is a parental figure who makes people do things right, to behave, and be good. In this case, she becomes the ally of the id and promotes and encourages forbidden sexual behavior, but by using traditional superego methods. There is also a subtle ego element. The customers can take advantage of her dedication, to receive more than the usual amount of service for their fee. This kind of craftiness is a

ego function. The joke also suggests that "niceties," or less authoritative and moralistic superego functions, also serve the interests of id gratification. Not all superego rules are paternalistic; some are maternalistic and suggest id forces are legitimate and acceptable if exercised "properly." It suggests that some aspects of superego are "soft" or "negotiable" under the right circumstances. Sexual drives are here recognized as legitimate; aggressive drives against authority are not sanctioned--the teacher is "boss," but serves erotic drives.

The next joke emphasizes various aspects of the superego, but also has implications for the concept of the reality principle versus infantile omnipotence. Contrary to the earlier Freudian view of jokes, the satisfaction of instinctual drives in this joke seems to be a minor rather than a major theme. It could be argued that there is an attempt in this joke to influence some interactions in the psychic structure. That is, the joke can be viewed as an argument in favor of certain attitudes about the reality principle, omnipotence, and the superego.

Joke: St. Peter and Jesus Christ were playing golf one day and their scores were exactly even at the end of the 17th hole. They teed up for the 18th hole, and St. Peter hit a beautiful drive. His ball landed on the green and rolled to within an inch of the cup. Jesus hit

his drive, and it started to slice toward the rough. Just as the ball was about to land in the rough, 100 yards short of the green, Jesus gestured and the ball changed course and landed on the green and rolled into the cup. St. Peter looked at Jesus and said, "Are you going to fuck around, or are you going to play golf?"

Analysis: This joke contains aggression against respected persons and, hence, satisfies hostile urges. Although both figures begin as superego personifications, Jesus is superior. And then, St. Peter becomes an ego figure in the process of the joke. There is denigration of the superego in two ways: St. Peter talks crudely to him, and Jesus behaves in a bad way by cheating at golf. Also, merely playing golf is a blow to superego dignity. So, there is ample lowering of the importance of the superego. We could say that a major theme of the joke is denigration of the superego.

The second major theme is very important: the polarity between narcissitic infantile omnipotence and the reality principle on the part of Jesus. Golf is played in terms of the reality principle. If Jesus uses supernatural power to win the game, the reality principle is lost. St. Peter obviously disparages Jesus' narcissistic omnipotence and unwillingness to "play golf," that is, to use the reality principle. This joke denigrates omnipotence

and magic and affirms the reality principle and therefore, the ego. If we classify narcissistic urges as being within the sphere of the id, then this joke ridicules the id. In the clash between id, ego, and superego, the outcome is uncertain at the end of the joke. St. Peter representing the ego and the reality principle has challenged Jesus, but what Jesus will do in response is not stated in the joke. Jesus represents a combination of id (or narcissism) and archaic superego (corrupt, self-indulgent power). In terms of ego mastery and ego defenses, it seems that St. Peter uses confrontation or interpretation in his remark to Jesus and that Jesus is acting out.

In the next joke there is also a theme of ridicule or disparagement of the id, of instinctual urges. This is contrary to the traditional Freudian concept. The reversal here is that instead of the superego being bypassed or overturned to satisfy the id, the superego is made to appear more appealing than the id. It is not so much a matter of winning a struggle in the traditional sense, but that certain ego and superego states can be viewed as more worthy or admirable and by implication, the audience is encouraged to want more superego, not less, but not necessarily because of fear of retaliation by the punitive archaic superego. This would be a part of the rational, conscious, and mature area of superego.

It affirms the psychoanalytic idea that a difference exists between rational and neurotic guilt.

Joke: Back in the gold rush days in California, there was a very small mining town in an isolated part of the mountains. The town had only a few houses and a little hotel with a restaurant. There were no women in the town or for miles around. One day a newly arrived miner approached the hotel owner with a request for information about where he might find some sexual outlet. The hotel man explained the circumstances and indicated there were no women around at all and no possibility of sexual relief, unless, in desperation, one wished to try Sam, the Chinese cook. The man said heatedly that he "didn't go for that shit," and left. Several weeks later he returned to the hotel and said to the hotel man that his need had become so great, that he was now ready to try Sam, the Chinese cook. But, he said he wanted it to be strictly confidential because he really "didn't go for that shit," and would be embarrassed if many people knew. The hotel man said that several people would know. He, the hotel man, would know; Sam would know; and the two guys that would have to restrain Sam would also know because, "Sam doesn't go for that shit either."

Analysis: This joke has aggressive elements toward Sam, women, Chinese, and the miner. There is a racist

cruelty in the assumption that the Chinese cook would be used in this way, and the sexist cruelty in the implication that women would be too, if they were present. The audience can feel superior to the miner. The homosexual theme provides fantasy gratification. The superego is present in the joke in the rather weak struggle the miner has with his sexual desires. The hotel man represents the ego at its most practical, and hence, represents aspects of the reality principle. There is an interesting switch in the ending of the joke. Sam, during the joke has been an object not a person. The drama was with the, presumably, Caucasian miner, and his superego struggle. In the conclusion, we are forcefully made aware of Sam as a human being, not an object. And there is some triumph in this. The miner, with his easily corruptible superego is the real butt of ridicule in the joke. This is a situation in which more, not less, superego would be appropriate. So, it can be seen that not all jokes, at a structural and narrative level win over or denigrate the superego. It is not totally clear as to whether it is the ego or superego of Sam that influences him to not be a homosexual partner. However, this kind of affirmation of personal power or dignity is what Freud is talking about in his essay on Humor, in which he cites an instance of gallows humor to illustrate the

alliance of the ego and superego. His theory is that the superego takes a helpful, sheltering attitude toward a suffering or endangered ego. The real winner in the joke is the rational and mature part of the superego. Sam would be seen as an ego personification.

Freud's idea of gallows humor is present in various jokes involving human suffering. Freud thought that the purpose of what he referred to as "humor" was to reaffirm the power of the suffering ego by having the superego provide its help and support. It can be put in another way using a modern theory that comes out of analytic treatment: the observing part of the ego can ally itself with the nurturant parts of the superego, and distance itself from the suffering. The suffering is viewed from a sufficiently removed perspective to lower the level of pain and involvement. It is like the folk wisdom, "In a hundred years, who will know the difference?"

The suffering of war, and the suffering coming from the defeat of the ego by overwhelming circumstances is brought out in the following joke. This is an example of Freud's gallows humor.

Joke: During World War II a Jewish man was prisoner in one of the Nazi death camps. The commander of the camp was a man who was famous for his cruelty, and also known as a person who had a glass eye. When the Jew was

was brought to the camp, the commander said to him that if he were able to guess which eye was glass, his life would be spared for a few weeks, but if he guessed wrong, he would be killed right away. When the Jew correctly guessed which eye was glass, the Nazi asked him how he knew. The Jew answered that he chose the eye that seemed to have a glimmer of human kindness.

Analysis: Viewing this joke from the economic point of view and stressing the aggressive elements is correct only in a very limited sense. The real point of the joke is the reaffirmation of the dignity of the Jew; he will not grovel or crawl, he taunts the oppressor. This joke becomes a small triumph for the victim. Hence, it supports, renews, or enhances aspects of the ego, and aspects of the mature healthy part of the superego that includes ideals. The fact that there is great pleasure in "getting" the Nazi, is not so important as the reaffirmation of the integrity of the Jew. This is an example of healing humor in a joke. As a struggle between id, ego, and superego, the Nazi represents id and the Jew represents ego. The Nazi wants to kill and endangers the Jew. The superego aspect is in the audience to the joke who offer their sympathy and support of the Jew. The Nazi is the villain. This follows Freud's idea of the superego comforting an ego in distress. The wit

of the Jew is a grand gesture of contempt for danger and lets the ego "win" and be comforted, if only temporarily.

The ego defense operating is denial; the Jew can momentarily lose his sense of terror. Ego mastery is involved in producing the wit. The comforting aspects of superego are momentarily mobilized.

As we have seen, many jokes ridicule and attack the superego. Here is a joke that laughs at a different part of the psychic structure; it ridicules the id.

Joke: During a trip to Africa a golfer happened to see a very interesting sight while walking in the jungle. He came upon a huge gorilla who was hitting rocks with a stick. The gorilla was consistently hitting golf ball sized rocks for distances of 500 yards or more. The golfer decided to take the gorilla to America; once there, he took the gorilla to a golf course, gave him a driver, teed up a ball, and pointed to the distant green with its flag. The gorilla hit the ball 500 yards and it landed on the green. The golfer was overjoyed; he led the gorilla to the green, gave him a putter, and pointed to the cup. The gorilla hit the ball 500 yards.

Analysis: There is aggression in this joke, both the gorilla and the golfer can be seen as foolish, and the audience can look down on them. It would appear that there is no pronounced superego element in this joke. The

golfer represents the force of the ego; he does things, manages, directs, has goals, etc. All his activities are in the practical, not the moral, area. The gorilla seems to be a symbolic representation of id. He has power, but no guiding principles or purpose other than pure pleasure. The gorilla is unable to adjust his power to changing situations, and indeed, does not apprehend differences in situations. The idea of pure id is ridiculed and the point seems to be that ego is a necessary force. A secondary point is that the golfer (ego) is ridiculed for his failure to control the brute force. The defenses of the ego and various ego functions are implied in the joke by virtue of their absence in the gorilla. The audience to the joke can clearly see the need for various ego functions. The fantasy of magical or purely natural power is exposed as an impossibility.

The joke is interesting as an example of the opposite of the kind of jokes considered by Freud. In his jokes the repressed wishes circumvent the repressing forces and the wishes "win" and are in a sense, the "heroes" of the narrative. In the gorilla joke, one sees the value of ego and the ineptness of pure wishes or drives. The outcome is that the ego "wins" by increasing its status.

There is some evidence that joke appreciation differs relative to age; that there are developmental stages for

people, and the jokes they appreciate conform to it. The jokes of young children often enjoy aspects of the id and tend to conform to Freud's theory very well. The jokes that amuse children of grammar school age are often not funny to adults. The grammar school age child is passing through various stages of mastery and is not yet genital. His jokes tend to be very crude, hostile, obvious, silly, and tend to focus on crude anal, urethral, and body themes. For example:

Joke: Ike, Mike, and Mustard (a notorious trio similar to the three Stooges) were in their third story apartment one day when the water in the apartment building was shut off. Mustard had the urge to move his bowels, but the toilet was not flushing due to the plumbing problem. Mustard decided to put his behind out the window and defecate outside. Just as he was doing this, a policeman was walking by underneath and was hit on the head. The policeman became very angry and rushed upstairs and banged on the door. Ike and Mike came to the door, and the policeman shook his hat under their noses and furiously asked, "Did you do this?" Ike and Mike said, "It must have been Mustard," to which the policeman replied, "Mustard, hell, this is shit!"

Analysis: This joke has obvious aggressive themes of a very strong nature. The sexual theme is anal. The

grammar school joke lends itself very well to being almost completely interpreted through economic theories. Most of these jokes center on the id. The policeman represents the superego, who insists on anal cleanliness, and the repression of anal eroticism, just like the parents. This joke is a rebellion against toilet training. The ego is employed to rationalize and make excuses. That is, the water was turned off in the apartment. Ike and Mike can be the good children, like the audience to the joke, who enjoy such things by identification. The superego (policeman) is the target of hostility in that he is defiled and then an attempt is made to fool him, so he is also ridiculed. To children, also, the mere speaking of forbidden words is also an expression of aggression and anality. Mustard is the most id-like of the three boys. Ike and Mike are more like ego figures. In this joke the id "wins."

Joke: The Lone Ranger and Tonto were riding in the hills one day when suddenly they were surrounded by hostile Indians. They took refuge behind some rocks and drew their pistols. The Indians began attacking and the Lone Ranger could see that they were outnumbered 100 to 1, with no way to escape. He said to Tonto, "We're in big trouble this time, Kimosabe." To which Tonto answered, "Where do you get that "we" shit, paleface?"

Analysis: This joke gratifies sadistic or aggressive wishes with the picture of the slaughter and betrayal of the Lone Ranger. If we carry the analysis further, we can see the psychological defense used by Tonto: identification with the aggressor. This defense was discussed by Anna Freud as a way of dealing with anxiety and threat. The attack of the other person against the self is denied and changed to an attack by the self against others in a similar way. The behavior of Tonto in the joke is an excellent illustration of this defense. Tonto, in danger of death from Indians, solves the problem by becoming an Indian. Hence, he is safe. In this joke the Indians who want to kill represent the id. Tonto who seeks a practical workable way to survive represents the ego and employs an appropriate defense. The Lone Ranger is also ego under attack. He strives to survive too, but with less success. Although the joke does not give the outcome, we might assume that with racial loyalty, Tonto survives. Identification with the aggressor "wins." The id also "wins" with the death of the Lone Ranger. Super-ego seems absent or very weak. Tonto fails to live up to the superego ideal of loyalty to the Lone Ranger. The Lone Ranger might, alternatively, be viewed as having superego qualities which are defeated. That is, he asks for loyalty (by implication), but doesn't receive it. Indians are like archaic superego combined with id.

Joke: In the city there was a series of rapes by the man who was called the "Polish Rapist." One of his victims was a woman who was ashamed of the fact that she had been raped and who did not, therefore, report it to the police. She later heard a TV broadcast by the police asking for witnesses to come forth because the Polish Rapist had been caught, and they needed victims to identify him. The woman reconsidered and decided to help and went to where they were conducting a "line-up." The Polish Rapist was standing in the line. When the woman came into the room, he jumped around excitedly and pointed at her, and said, "She is the one who did it to me, arrest her, she is the one."

Analysis: There is gratification of sexual and hostile urges through the fantasy of the rape. There is additional aggressive or hostile gratification from looking down on the stupidity of the rapist. The action of the rapist in ascribing his motives and actions to another utilizes the psychoanalytic concept of projection, which is a defense of the ego. The rapist being in danger of imprisonment acts like an endangered ego, and hence, the use of this defense. The ego has as a main task the implementation of the gratification of id impulses in acceptable ways. This joke shows a failure of that task and the projection is symptom-like, inasmuch as it is a foiled adaptation.

In the struggle of id, ego, and superego, the police represent superego and they "win." The rapist is id plus failed ego. The woman represent failed ego and mature superego.

Joke: A young woman who was very fond of music, especially opera, met a famous operatic tenor. After a brief courtship, they married. The tenor had a beautiful vocal instrument--suave, powerful, lustrous, rich, and moving. On the morning after the first night of their honeymoon, the bride awoke and, after contemplating her sleeping husband for a few minutes, woke him and said, "For goodness sakes, dear, sing to me."

Analysis: Interpreted on the basic Freudian level, this joke gratifies sexual interest and aggressive drives. The audience can enjoy a feeling of hostile superiority over the tenor because of his implied inadequate sexual equipment. Further analysis, however, shows two psychological concepts are also operating: displacement and sublimation. The woman, by using displacement from vocal instrument to sexual instrument, assumed that the tenor's sexual ability would be analagous to his musical ability. When she realized the mistake she made, she accepts a substitute, utilizing sublimation as a defense.

The relationship between displacement and sublimation is very close. In this joke the voice symbolizes the genitals.

It is then possible to equate them and displace interest from one to the other. A sublimation in Freud's view is the successful, unconscious, substitution of one goal for another. Hence, we might assume, if we wish, that sublimation has been approached but has not been entirely successful in the joke. In the joke the wife represents ego attempting to adjust, and to the extent that the sublimation works, she does. The wife also represents id, insofar as her sexual interests are concerned, and these wishes are frustrated. Id "loses." The archaic superego as a repressing force against lust, "wins." The tenor represents adaptational failure.

Joke: Pat and Mike, two telephone linemen, were working one day just up the street from a local brothel. Their position on the telephone pole gave them an excellent view of the street and the front door of the establishment. As they were watching, along came the Protestant minister, who stopped and entered the house. Pat and Mike were scandalized by this and spoke at length of their disappointment in the morals of the minister. A little later, the same scene repeated when the rabbi entered the house. Pat and Mike were deeply disturbed by the base lusts and lack of control of a man of the cloth. Then Father Kelly of the local parish church rang the bell and entered the house. Pat turned to Mike and said, "Isn't that too bad? One of the girls here must be very sick."

Analysis: The sexual elements are the fantasy or expectation that these clergymen are having sex with the prostitutes. The aggressive element comes from the enjoyment of sadistic superiority over the morally imperfect clergymen. Also, there is hostility directed against Irish, Jews, Protestants, and Catholics. This joke is an excellent example of the psychological mechanism of rationalization. Pat and Mike make a different assumption about the behavior of the three clergymen based on need rather than logic or fact, inasmuch as the facts are all the same in all three cases. Rationalization is a major defense of the ego. Pat and Mike are identified with the priest and have a need to rationalize to avoid confronting forbidden instinctual impulses in him, and hence, themselves. Pat and Mike play the role of the superego for part of the joke, until they are threatened themselves. The prostitutes represent id forces. The clergy are superego figures who are mocked by the id. The superego is ridiculed. The id wins in the main, with some small triumph to the ego through rationalization. Superego is weak, ridiculed, and defeated.

Joke: One day in a small rural town in the deep south, a small elderly black man was walking along the sidewalk when he saw a big young white man walking toward him from the other way. As they neared, the white man seemed to think

there was not enough room on the sidewalk for both of them, and he pushed the black man into the street saying, "Keep outa ma way, boy." He then began beating the black man very severely. Later, the black man was telling some friends and relatives about the assault and he said, "That white man hit me in the stomach, he hit me in the head, he threw me down on the ground, and he kept on kicking me and kicking--I never got so tired of a person in my life."

Analysis: The physical aggression in this joke is extreme. Also, the audience can look down on the white man or the black man depending on one's view of racial matters. In terms of psychoanalytic theory, the main interest in the joke would be the black man's use of the defense of denial, a defense of the ego. Denial is differentiated from repression, that is, in repression there is no conscious memory of the occurrence, while in denial the occurrence is remembered but it is denied importance or denied the appropriate amount of feeling. The black man in the joke instead of expressing rage, expresses mild annoyance; this is an excellent example of denial. The joke for many of us is too true to be funny. We understand the history of the south in which murder and torture of blacks was commonplace and is still possible today. Submission is one way of survival for

blacks and denial is one of the defenses used by the ego to cope with this situation. Hence, the joke is not funny; it reminds one of the stories of Shalom Aleckam in which Jews in the "pale" of Russia must struggle to survive the pogroms and the Cossacks. These stories don't bring the joy of laughter, but may produce a grim smile. If there is a healing element in these stories and jokes, then perhaps it comes from the perspective that the ego achieves on viewing the universality of brutality, and of the staying power of downtrodden people. The black man, by being restrained, polite, and strong, will survive. The black man as ego, attempts to protect himself through denial. Unlike the story of the Jew and Nazi, the black man does not win even temporarily. His only protection is from denial. The white man wants to hurt and is id. A superego position is implied but not personified in the joke.

Joke: On Christmas a little girl received several presents; her favorite ones were a bottle of perfume and a charm bracelet. She thanked her family profusely and spoke at length about how she loved the scent of the perfume and the jingling sound of the bracelet. All during the day as friends dropped in she told each one about her gifts, until her talking became excessive and annoying to the family. She was finally forbidden to use the words

"perfume" and "charm bracelet" at all, under the threat of punishment. Later in the evening when her older sister's boyfriend came to visit, she said to him, "If you hear anything or smell anything, it's me."

Analysis: In agreement with the theories of Freud, it could be said that this joke provides both sexual and aggressive gratification. At one level this is an id joke and expresses anal and aggressive wishes. The audience of the joke is able to enjoy prohibited anal activity through the allusion to flatulence, and aggressive activity through ridiculing the little girl for her mistake and the parents for their presumed embarrassment. The audience, who wouldn't be so foolish, can feel superior to everyone. We infer that the little girl's delight in perfume and a charm bracelet means that she is enjoying the idea of becoming an older girl who is more grown up and genital. When the parents forbid her talking about it, it is as though they forbid her becoming genital. She then regresses to the anal stage in her behavior. This joke is a creative product, and expresses, perhaps unconsciously, a knowledge and appreciation of the psychoanalytic concept of regression. The id in alliance with conscious and unconscious parts of the ego, seeks a way to circumvent the parents (and the superego) to overcome the frustration. The parents in

the joke are superego figures. The little girl is a combination of id and ego. The id drives are implied in the wish to act older, and are specific in the reference to flatulence. In the outcome of the struggle between id, ego, and superego, the superego "wins" in part, in that the behavior is stopped. The id "wins" in its secondary goal of anality. The ego "loses" and is attempting to cope and recover. There is an attempt to avoid punishment (loss of love, castration) and at the same time be gratified (be grown up, enjoy perfume and a charm bracelet). This attempt goes awry in the joke, and there is an implied ridicule of the regression and the behavior.

Regression is sometimes a defense of the ego. Regression happens to the ego and seems to be set in motion by the instincts which, blocked from direct satisfaction, seek a substitute. Whenever a person meets a frustration, there is a tendency for him to long for earlier periods of life when experiences were more pleasant.

Joke: A deaf man and a deaf woman met and, after a brief courtship, married. On their wedding night they had sexual intercourse for the first time and were delighted with the experience. They began "discussing" it (by using

sign language), and one of them pointed out that they had made love with the lights on and that therefore they had been able to communicate with sign language. The question was raised as to what should be done if the lights were out and they were unable to see the sign language. The wife suggested that, in the dark, if she wanted sex she would pull her husband's penis once. She wondered what the signal should be if she didn't want to have sex. The husband thought awhile and said that in that case she should pull it about 75 times.

Analysis: This joke has both aggressive and sexual components. The sexual content is the sexual intercourse and the implied manual stimulation. The aggressive component is inherent in, first, creating characters who are handicapped and then subjecting them to exposure and ridicule. An analytic view of the handicap of deafness is that it is castration displaced to the ears. The joke contains some reassurance to the implied anxiety about the handicap (castration), that is, that these deaf people can be sexually active even with this problem. This is early in the joke. Later, the anxiety is aroused again by the concept of being in the dark; the handicap is reasserted or emphasized, sign language then fails. An interesting solution is then found: sex can still be possible and the handicap can be overcome. However, the

solution involves some castration fear. In the second instance of manual sex, there is a retreat from full sexuality to protect against the castration threat. This is an example of regression as a defense. The couple both represent ego which is endangered and defending itself. The superego role is implied. The id is present in terms of the sexual drives. The superego has a slight victory in causing regression, but the outcome is mixed, with both id and ego mostly holding their own.

Joke: A 70 year old man went to the doctor because he wanted his "sex drive lowered." The doctor was incredulous and asked, "A man your age, you want your sex drive lowered?" The man replied, "Yes Doctor, from here (he points to his head) to here," (he points to his genitals).

Analysis: This joke has some sexual content; the idea of this older man having sex, but it is mostly a ridiculing and hostile joke directed to the man's age and failing potency. The 70 year old man is using obsessional thinking, and the joke beautifully understands that obsessional thoughts (of sex) must be accompanied by feelings to constitute a healthy condition. We could speculate that obsessional sexual thoughts in a 70 year old man might well be a defense against fears of aging

and death. Obsessional thinking is both a symptom and a defense of the ego. The joke implies too much is going on in the mind and too little is going on in the body. There is no clear superego in the joke; the doctor represents the practical, sensible ego. The patient represents failed adaptations and is, hence, also an ego figure, but not a very successful one. The id drives are part of the patient, too. The id seems to "lose," but there is no clear win for the superego in the matter of the sex drive. However, the id "wins" in the hostile ridicule of the patient in the joke itself.

Some jokes illustrate neurotic symptoms, which can be considered as less successful functions of adaptation and properly belong in the sphere of the ego.

Joke: An American engineer signed a long term contract to work in the oil fields in the Near East. Upon arriving at his post, the engineer was dismayed to discover that his job was located deep in the desert where there were no women at all for hundreds of miles. After a long period of sexual abstinence, he asked the advice of another worker who had been there longer. The engineer was advised to have sex with female camels. He soon learned that due to the long legs of the camels he would have to pile up sand with a shovel in order to stand on a mound behind the camel. He began piling up sand behind a camel,

but the camel moved away each time the engineer got the sand piled up high enough. The engineer kept shoveling sand and the camel kept moving away until, at length they wandered far out into the desert. All of a sudden, they came upon a beautiful young woman who was being abducted by a couple of Bedouins. The engineer was armed and was able to rescue the lady and scare off her tormentors. The woman was very happy and grateful and told the engineer that she would do anything he wished as a gesture of her deep gratitude. The engineer said there was something he did really need: that she please hold his camel so it couldn't move, while he piled up a mound of sand?

Analysis: At one level this joke gratifies both sexual and aggressive wishes. There is the opportunity to have sex with the beautiful woman, or with a camel. The audience can feel superior to the engineer because of his obtuseness in regard to the offer of the beautiful woman. There is another level of meaning, however, which shows an understanding of neurotic symptoms, and more particularly, repetition compulsion.

Freud spoke of the concept of repetition compulsion in reference to working through of neurotic symptoms. He found that neurotic persons persisted in maladaptive behavior even where circumstances had changed for the better.

Instead of reacting to actual situations according to their specific real nature, they would react in rigid symptomatic patterns as though the old circumstance still pertained. The engineer in the joke is a good illustration of this psychological mechanism. We will assume that he acquired a symptom of lust for camels as an adaptation to a lack of women. When suddenly, a woman was available, the persistence of the symptom, that is, repetition compulsion, made it impossible to react to the opportunity offered by the lady. There is no consistent personification of superego in the joke. The id drives are present in the engineer. He also represents ego attempting to cope. Early in the joke he reacts to an implied superego standard. The outcome of the joke represents partial failure for the ego inasmuch as a symptom is formed rather than acceptable gratification. The implied pleasure is regressive and perverse. The archaic superego wins and the ego loses this struggle.

The subject of neurotic symptoms is closely related to the subject of neurotic character traits. They are both partially successful and partly pathological ego functions. The following jokes illustrate character traits:

Joke: A man telephoned his Jewish mother to say "hello" and ask after her health and welfare. The mother answered him by saying she was as well as could be expected with an

unloving, ungrateful son who lets days and weeks go by without calling her. She could be dead and he wouldn't know, etc. The son apologized profusely. The mother relented somewhat and asked him to come to dinner the next Friday. The man agreed and the mother got a little more mollified. She asked after his wife "Rosalee." The man said, "But my wife's name is "Isabel. Is this Mrs. Goldberg?" The mother said, "No, my name is Mrs. Rosen." The man said he was sorry he must have dialed the wrong number. To which Mrs. Rosen replied in a newly aggrieved voice, "Does this mean you're not coming to dinner Friday?"

Analysis: Following Freud's idea that all jokes have sexual and/or aggressive themes we would say that this joke says unkind things about both mother and son. The audience can take a position of aggressive superiority. This joke begins with the mother as an outraged superego figure, the son, as an endangered ego figure, is contrite. The tradition of the Jewish mother joke is followed: it is understood from similar jokes that the mother is a passive-aggressive (martyred and guilt producing) person of great stubbornness and self righteousness. The son is caught in the guilt and cannot rebel or free himself. In this joke, the superego mother is ridiculed as well as the imprisoning guilt of the son, which would be an

aspect of his pathological superego. Also, and perhaps more importantly, the main theme, the mother's possessiveness is so consuming that she will do it with any son. The mother could be seen as having a neurotic character trait. The mother views her behavior as proper, good, part of her, and certainly not pathological in any way. The hyperbole of the joke says that this neurotic character trait is so strong and indelible in this mother that she will go to the ludicrous extreme of doing it with any available person. In this joke it is not clear what happens, however, the superego is very strong and probably wins. The ego loses because of the cost in functioning due to the neurotic character trait. The id wins in the telling of the joke because of the aggressive pleasure of the audience.

Another joke about character traits indicates a knowledge of the persistence of character.

Joke: The Indian reservation was having a celebration because the new Indian Agent was coming to take over his duties, and there was to be an installation ceremony with speeches and a band. The Indian Agent, who was, of course, a Caucasian appointed by Washington, sat on the podium with the other dignitaries. When it was his turn to speak, he told his Indian audience that he understood that they had lived under years of neglect by Washington,

but that now things would be different. The audience shouted "Honya," with much verve and enthusiasm. The Indian Agent felt pleased to be making contact and establishing rapport. He went on to say that perhaps the government had been unfair in the past, but a new era was coming now. The Indians shouted "Honya" again. The Indian Agent continued to list the abuses and unfairnesses of the past and promised change. Many times he was interrupted by the excited cry of "Honya." The tribal chief spoke next and thanked the Indian Agent for his concern and helpfulness. The chief said that he had a gift for the Indian Agent and asked everyone to go to the corral for the presentation. When they arrived at the corral the Indian Agent was delighted to see that the gift was a beautiful horse. The Indian Agent was about to step over to mount the horse when the chief, who was accompanying him cautioned, "Watch where you're stepping. Don't step in the Honya."

This joke shows appreciation of the permanence of the character trait. The Indians knew the white man's character after many years of exposure to it. They knew that nothing would change and that the essence of character is its permanence. In terms of id, ego, and superego, the Indian Agent is a superego figure. The Indians are ego figures who lose in the narrative of the joke; however,

the joke itself defeats the superego through ridicule. This aggression is the id quality.

Wilhelm Reich developed a psychoanalytic concept of the character trait as differentiated from the neurotic symptom. The neurotic symptom is ego alien, or unpleasant and foreign to the person. The neurotic character trait seems to the person to be himself or ego syntonic.

Joke: Two prospectors were out in the mountains with burros, picks and shovels, looking for gold. Both men had been together for many years and had worked out ways to divide the many chores of camp life. Both men hated to cook and so they alternated days when one would cook and the other would wash dishes. One day the cleverer of the two said he had a new way to handle the cooking: the other man would cook until a complaint about the cooking was made and then they would switch until the other one complained, and so on. This was agreed to and they carried on in this fashion for a long time, however, the clever man never complained, and so he never had to take over the cooking. The other prospector began to sense that he had been fooled, and so he formulated a plan to extricate himself. He began to make the food bad on purpose. The clever man wouldn't complain no matter how bad the cooking became. Finally, in desperation the cook wrapped excrement in a tortilla and served it to his clever

partner who took a bite and with great shock said, "Shit! but good."

Analysis: This joke has very archaic id qualities of aggression and anality. The fantasy of eating excrement is very primitive. Also, there is aggression by both of the partners toward each other, and the audience can feel aggressively superior to both. There is little identifiable superego in this joke. The clever man has none and the cook is planning to change things on a basis of practicality, which involves ego functions. Both prospectors are ego figures coping with id forces. One could, perhaps, take the position that to have to eat excrement is a punishment by the superego, but this does not really fit the characterizations involved or the tone of the joke. The character of the clever man is interesting. He could perhaps be seen as a psychopathic person. That is, in wishing to avoid work and trouble, he harms a person he has known for a long time, completely without remorse. He still tries to keep his con game going at the end of the joke. The psychopath often shows this kind of self centeredness, and typically can be clever, and at the same time stupid. The willingness to go on eating excrement in order to escape work is the kind of judgment often seen in psychopaths. They often work harder at not working than other people at working.

They tend to overreach themselves and to be, ultimately, self destructive.

The point has been previously made that jokes usually have themes covering various aspects of the psychic structure. Aspects of id, ego, and superego can be in most jokes. Jokes that deal with castration fear and the oedipal situation would illustrate this interaction in, what is viewed in psychoanalysis, as the situation in which the superego is formed.

Freud thought that the oedipal situation was the time of the formation of the superego and that the fear of punishment in the form of fear of castration was the driving force in its formation. Actual castration has figured in (mostly) men's thoughts and activities. In women it takes the generalized form of body mutilation. Take as an example the drawings of Goya depicting the horrors of war. In some of these, soldiers are being castrated. It also occurs in plays and novels. Genet's The Balcony is but one example. This theme also finds its way into jokes too.

Joke: An opera singer consulted his physician one day and said (in a extremely hoarse voice), "Doctor, my voice sounds terrible, and I must sing a very important role next month. Can you help me?" The doctor examined him and discovered that he had an extremely large, long,

and heavy penis. The doctor told the singer that his problem was that the penis was so heavy it was stretching his vocal cords. He recommended surgically removing the middle five inches of the penis and sewing the front part back on. The singer agreed, the operation was performed, and it was a success. One day a few weeks later, the singer, by chance, met the doctor on the street and told him how good his voice was now and how well his career was going. He then said to the doctor, "By the way, what did you do with that middle 5 inches?" The doctor said in a very hoarse voice, "That's a professional secret."

Analysis: This joke has a great deal of aggression in it with the surgery performed on the singer. Also, one can look down on the doctor for his behavior. The joke is also a good illustration of the psychoanalytic concept of castration fear. The fear here occurs to the singer in the form of a "castrated" voice. (The beautiful voice is often unconsciously seen as seductive to the listener.) Freud's concept of displacement, a defense of the ego, is at work and the vital organ of the singer is the voice restored, but with ambiguous side effects. The original penis was an immense and reassuring 15 inches, but smaller than before. The theme is of a sacrifice in one area to save another. In the oedipal situation

the boy gives up his sexual desire for mother in exchange for his penis. The doctor then risks surgery himself to attain a reassuringly large powerful penis, but we have the idea that his wasn't so good before. The theme of castration and magical cure or rescue goes back and forth.

We might assume that the doctor is a superego figure in the joke who advises that one kind of sexuality be traded for another or sublimated to become culturally expressive singing. The doctor is like the father to the oedipal boy: sex with other females, retention of the penis, and a good relationship with father are traded for the wish to possess mother. The son is an ego figure and at the end of the joke the doctor-father (superego) possesses and keeps that renounced part of the sexuality of the singer-boy (ego). Another way of viewing this joke is that it somewhat illustrates a central part of Freudian theory: the ego, imperiled by a castration threat, forms and internalizes the superego. The external parental rules become a new part of the self and form the superego. The outcome of the joke is that the superego wins. Oedipal id impulses are renounced and the id loses (from the point of view of the singer). The ego wins in terms of learning acceptable adaptational functions.

Here is another joke with the castration theme:

Joke: A travelling salesman stops at a farm one evening and asks to rent a room for the night. The farmer says he has no room except for his daughter's room, which he can't, of course, let him have. The salesman says that his penis was shot off during the war and so he would be safe to share the room with the daughter. The farmer agrees and the salesman shares the room with the farmer's daughter. The next morning the daughter comes down to breakfast disheveled and with dark circles under her eyes. The farmer suspects that there has been sexual activity going on and accuses the salesman of lying about having his penis shot off. The salesman insists that it was shot off; however, he admits that it left a "14 inch stump."

Analysis: The sexual content of this joke is obvious. The aggressive element is diverse; the man has an injured penis. We can feel superior to the farmer for being gullible and to the daughter for being a willing object to a chance encounter. This joke also has oedipal themes, but with a different perspective than the previous joke. In the joke about the singer, the singer willingly renounces his omnipotent, oedipal strivings symbolized by an over large penis. In this joke, if we see the farmer as the father and superego, then the salesman (son) persists in his object of sex with the farmer's female relative (ego plus id), even though an attempt has been made to castrate

him. The salesman in the role of oedipal son is not conquered; he survives castration and has a "14 inch stump"--a reassuringly large and powerful remainder. The ego and id "win." The superego figure is weak and stupid and easily fooled and circumvented. The daughter (mother) is totally compliant. This is the oedipal wish achieved. The castration attempt is unsuccessful. The two jokes are very unlike in outcome, and in terms of neurosis, or pathology are very different.

From the example of this joke it is possible to see a joke, also, as a diagnostic awareness when examined with reference to other diagnostic data, or as an awareness of pathology or health.

Freud thought that there were times when the unconscious urges produced "mistakes" and forgetting, that were not actually pathological. Unconscious aspects of the ego, superego, and id are involved in these "mistakes." The following joke illustrates some of these ideas.

Joke: The male sergeant in charge of a company of female soldiers was conducting a drill and inspection by the order of the company commander. The company did close order drill and rifle inspection. Then, the sergeant has the company stack arms, and he ordered the women to remove their uniform jackets, their shirts and brassieres. There was some grumbling and protest in the ranks, but the

sergeant insisted and said that women in the army had to learn to take orders. After they had disrobed as ordered, the sergeant went down the line and squeezed each breast of each soldier. While this was going on, the company commander happened to come by and in an astonished voice said, "Sergeant, what in hell are you doing?" The sergeant replied, "Just following your orders, sir." The company commander then said, "I told you to inspect their KITS."

Analysis: There is sexual content in this joke as well as aggression directed against the women by violating their privacy. There is aggression directed against the sergeant for his "stupidity" also. This joke has a theme of repression as a means of achieving gratification. Freud in his book Psychopathology of Everyday Life, developed a concept of the common "mistake" being a repression to achieve some unconscious purpose. He thought that many "mistakes," "forgettings," etc. were not necessarily pathological or neurotic, but had the purpose of circumventing the superego to attain some nonpathological end. They are aspects of unconscious ego, which "wins." In the joke, the company commander is a personification of superego, and by repressing what he really said, the sergeant (ego plus id) was able to gratify himself sexually and aggressively toward the women soldiers. The mistake

and repression would then be seen as aspects of the unconscious ego.

Summary of the Analysis of the Jokes

It was found in the examination of the jokes that jokes often have more than one theme and can also be focused on more than one part of the psychic structure. Major and secondary themes can be identified. Having noted this, we can also say that it is useful and feasible to loosely classify jokes as to their themes for purposes of a clearer and more orderly presentation with the understanding that certain issues are distinguishable, if inseparable. The classification or labeling of a joke in terms of a psychoanalytic theory has certain heuristic and mnemonic values as long as the fact of the actual complexity of jokes is kept in mind.

In the analyzed jokes various symbolic representations of the superego were found. This concept of the superego can produce confusion if one is only used to the concept of the superego as strict and punitive. Edmund Bergler, for instance, regards the superego as implacably severe and thinks that the lifelong task of the ego is to avoid and evade its harsh criticism. In this study it will be proposed that the theory be expanded to include the concept that there are various aspects of the superego which function as though they were different or separate

from each other. There are qualities of the superego, which can be characterized, for example, as "archaic" or as "mature," "protective" or "punitive."

The analysis of the jokes shows a variety of different superegos: the archaic, harsh, murderous superego appears in the joke about the auto accident. (page 52) In this joke, superego is implied rather than being personified in the narrative. This joke also illustrates that superego can be unconscious. The superego in this case is also very strong, that is, it was successful and effective in exacting a terrible punishment.

In the joke about the girl whose date "worried" his own mother, (page 54), the superego is personified and is archaic or overly forbidding, but it is also weak or ineffectual. That is to say, no lustful activity was stopped and no punishment was forthcoming. The superego in this joke, in the form of the mother's training, was conscious. This joke shows that the conscious superego can be ridiculed in a joke and be defeated. This is in contrast to the auto accident joke in which the unconscious archaic superego is respected and is victorious.

In the joke about savoir-faire, (page 57), the scholarly debate of the three Frenchmen exerts a modifying effect on the superego and the ego instructs it in how to change its attitudes, presumably permanently. This

might be characterized as a superego which has been educated by the ego.

In some of the jokes, like the incestuous siblings (page 60), or the prospector who hated cooking (page 98), the superego seems to be absent. We might say the joke is a comment on the absence of the superego. The jokes tend to show a variety of superego weaknesses and corruptibility, as well as the better-known and understood power and harshness.

The jokes also show differing relationships with the id and ego, and superego. In some jokes there is a stronger bond between id and superego, and in others, the bond is between ego and superego. All of the gallows humor jokes seem to be of the type in which the superego helps and comforts the ego; hence, ego and superego are allied. The joke about the school teacher (page 69) who became a prostitute is an illustration of the theme of cooperation between id and superego.

Some jokes provide a characterization of how mature or healthy the superego is. In the theory of psychoanalytic treatment, as contrasted to the theory of personality, it is thought that a large part of successful treatment is the modification of the superego from its archaic harshness to a more reasonable maturity. This is not to be confused with abandonment of ethical standards, but

rather a maturing quality of appropriateness of standards. Lack of superego is pathological and too much superego is pathological. The jokes about the older woman "buying it back" (page 65), or the joke about savoir-faire (page 57), are illustrations of the presence of the theme of mature, conscious superego. We can examine jokes for their diagnostic or evaluative content in terms of the maturity or pathology of the superego and ego representations and themes.

In the examination of jokes found to be predominantly concerned with the id, one is involved for the most part in jokes most appropriately analyzed by economic theory. These jokes are predominantly structured to provide gratification of sexual and/or aggressive urges. It is this class of jokes that fits Freud's theories of 1905 the best.*

However, jokes can be found in which there is ridicule of the id, rather than gratification of the id. The joke about the gorilla (page 77) is an example of ridicule of the id. Jokes that can be characterized by the predominant id themes have a tendency to be crude and simple. Many jokes told and appreciated by children have id themes.

* It might be noted here that perhaps Freud's cultural context was different with a different standard of humor. Whether jokes change over time and cultural contexts is beyond the range of this study, but is an interesting topic for future study.

In the examination of jokes with predominant themes about the ego, a greater amount of complexity and diversity can be found. Symbolic representations of various ego capacities can be seen, such as: defenses of the ego, character traits, symptoms, pathologies, skills, adaptations, etc. Both conscious and unconscious ego can also be found.

The following defenses of the ego were symbolically represented or implied in the examined jokes: acting out, denial, displacement, identification with the aggressor, projection, rationalization, regression, repression and obsessional thought. Certain other defenses were not found in this particular group of jokes, for example: isolation.

The following symptoms were symbolically represented, mentioned, or implied: repetition compulsion, castration fear, and oedipal concerns. Neurotic character traits and character disorders were found as themes.

Non-pathological and positive ego states were found as themes or were symbolically represented or implied, such as identification and sublimation, as well as a variety of ego skills found in normal functioning.

Conclusions and Summary of Findings

Many jokes can be examined to identify within them a complex body of data, which when viewed from a point of view of psychoanalytic theory, will be seen to correspond

to various psychoanalytic concepts. Following Freud's early theory, it can be said that jokes express sexual and/or aggressive drives. Following the conclusion of this study, it can also be said that other characteristics are apparent in jokes in addition to the gratification of sexual and aggressive wishes.

The narrative of the joke can contain symbolic representations, personifications, or implications of the conscious or unconscious id, ego, or superego. The id, ego, and superego representations can be varied and do not have a necessarily consistent role, or consistent characteristics. Freud saw a consistent interaction between the force of repression and the repressed in jokes; he examined jokes in which the repressed would win gratification by circumventing the repressing force. In this study the concepts of id, ego, and superego were employed and it was seen that numerous permutations of forces are seen in jokes. Various ego states are represented in jokes, also various characteristics of superego and ego. Different parts of the psychic structure can win or lose in different jokes. The interaction, importance, and relative dominance of id, ego, and superego in a joke, varies from joke to joke. The variations in the characteristics of the id, ego and superego representations in jokes reflect a variation in the psychological meanings found in the jokes.

Some jokes were found to have themes of various ego functions, masteries, or defenses, as well as symptom formations and various adaptive failures (seen as parts of the ego). Many jokes were found to have an outcome in the struggle between id, ego, and superego; that is, some force would "win." Id, ego, and superego were sometimes personified by actual characters in the jokes, and sometimes implied as a force in the joke, but not personified.

The analysis of jokes in this study showed the presence of psychological content in addition to sexual or aggressive. Also, there were jokes in which the sexual or aggressive content did not seem to be the main emphasis. Sexual or aggressive content was present in all jokes examined, however.

The superego was not always defeated in every joke. From an economic viewpoint some inhibiting forces were always defeated and some sexual or aggressive urges were always gratified; however, from a structural perspective the implied or symbolically represented superego was sometimes the "winner." Jokes were examined in which the id and ego combined against the superego, or superego allied with id, or ego. Id, ego, and superego varied in strength and effectiveness which also influences the outcome of the struggle of forces. There was a great

deal of variation in which part "won." There were partial and split victories.

When we speak of superego being "absent" in some jokes, it is meant that there is no personification or implication of it in the narrative. The superego is always present, however, in the total context as described by Freud. The superego is at least always in the mind of the creator of the joke, the teller, and the audience. Hence, it may be absent from the narrative but would be present in the "Gestalt" or "field" of the whole process. This same consideration would apply to any id jokes seeming to lack ego or reality principle.

The superego was protective toward the ego in some "gallows humor" jokes. The struggle was not always between the id and superego in all of the examined jokes. However, from an economic viewpoint every joke had some aspect of struggle between the inhibiting force and the repressed urge, even though this was not the major theme of every joke.

Various combinations and directions of force were found between id, ego, and superego in the examined jokes.

Discussion of Findings

In this investigation, a method of analyzing jokes was demonstrated in which symbolic representations of id, ego, and superego are sought in the narrative content of the joke. When identified and described, these representations are found to exhibit different characteristics from joke to joke.

In analyzing jokes the following points and questions were deemed to be important and were found in the jokes, and it is suggested that an outline containing these points of reference yields more complete information about any joke.

1. Presence of sexual drives and/or aggressive drives
2. The main emphasis of the narrative theme
3. Superego personifications, implications, symbolizations
4. What are the superego characteristics; strong, weak, archaic, absent, etc?
5. Ego functions and mastery
6. Ego defenses
7. Ego failures (partial successes), symptoms, etc.
8. What are the characteristics of ego states, mature, immature, successful, weak, etc.?
9. What is the outcome of the struggle between id, ego, and superego?

10. In the struggle of forces, how are the forces arranged and allied?
11. What are the vectors of force?
12. How are id, ego, and superego each personified, implied, or symbolized?

Not every point of this list will be of equal importance; the jokes will usually have a major psychological point or emphasis.*

A comparison of the findings of the study to the appropriate literature suggests confirmation of Freud's economic analysis, as all of the jokes evidenced sexual or aggressive drives. The study did not confirm, however, that economic analysis always yields the most important information. Many jokes were found in which the sexual or aggressive drives were not the main theme of the joke, but were a secondary and sometimes rather unimportant theme. The idea that the repressed urge always "wins" and the inhibiting force always "loses" was shown to be untrue insofar as the major theme of every joke is concerned. Jokes were found in which the superego "wins" in the major theme, and the minor theme carries some small gratification of sexual or aggressive urges.

* The validity of the specific findings of this investigator with specific jokes was not established, however, the method of analysis was demonstrated.

In regard to the structural theory of Freud in gallows humor, his view of the relationship between superego and ego was confirmed in some jokes. As stated earlier Freud saw the superego as protecting and comforting the ego in gallows humor. This is the only aspect of structural theory he dealt with.⁴⁴

In this study the superego and ego were found to be much more complex than Freud indicated. The examined jokes in this study found many others, which have been already described.

Abrahams, whose position is basically economic and the same as Freud's, was also confirmed by this study. No additional jokes about "family romance" were found, although some jokes with oedipal and castration themes were found. These were similar to some of Abraham's jokes and riddles.⁴⁵

Kris, Jacobson, and Grotjahn all see jokes as containing themes which make possible the reinforcement of ego mastery and ego defense. The jokes in the study often confirmed these ideas. Jacobson's point that children laugh in relation to mastered functions, especially

⁴⁴Sigmund Freud, "Humor," Character and Culture, (New York: Collier, 1963), pp. 263-9.

⁴⁵R. D. Abrahams, "On Elephantasy and Elephanticide," Psychoanalytic Review, Vol. 56, 11-69, pp. 225-241.

body functions, is apparent in the crude jokes of children dealing with bowel functions. Grotjahn's idea that there is no sexual gratification in jokes, only aggressive (in contradiction of Freud) is not supported by the jokes analyzed in this study.

Bergler's ideas are mostly the same as Freud's except that he contradicts Freud on the matter of the protectiveness of the superego in gallows humor. Bergler believes that the superego is always hurtful and antagonistic toward the ego. The findings in this study support Freud's and contradict Bergler's positions.*

* There are two well known books that have not as yet been discussed in the study because of their cultural focus and because they were written for a popular audience. They are only marginally useful in the study. However, the discussion would seem incomplete without some mention of these works: Jewish Wit by Theodore Reik and Beyond Laughter by Martin Grotjahn. In these popularized works on humor, Reik and Grotjahn, (and to some extent Bergler) tend to deal with jokes more from a cultural perspective than a psychoanalytic one. And, although written by psychoanalysts, these works have little psychoanalytic insight, but focus more often on conscious and cultural themes in jokes, wit, and riddles.

Clinical Application of the Joke Theory

Introduction. The main purpose of the dissertation, the analysis of the content of jokes to explore the theory of Freud, was completed in the preceding section. What follows is a demonstration of the possible or appropriate use of jokes in treatment. The task in the main section of the dissertation required a rigorous analysis and presentation of a circumscribed subject. In the following application the biases and values of the investigator are stated; this is admittedly subjective and suggestive only. Most of the points are not completely explored or verified, but that is because each would require a dissertation length presentation to do it justice. The points made come from two sources: the aspects of theory suggested by the main research which were interesting but tangential to the main study, and the clinical experience of the author which is being presented with the literature review and the results of the main study.

In the view of the author, in clinical practice the jokes of the patient should be analyzed; the jokes which come into the therapist's mind should be analyzed; but the therapist should never be witty, bantering, jovial, or a "fun person." * The therapist might tell a joke as an interpretation, or as a special form of support or encouragement on very

* The author recommends the article by Lawrence Kubie (page 7) to anyone who remains unconvinced on this point.

rare occasions. The number of jokes given below as examples, should not be seen as encouraging the telling of jokes by the therapist. In all cases used as examples, there were only one or two jokes told by the therapist during several years of treatment.

In the section in which the process of joke telling is discussed in terms of "joker" and "audience," or "listener," an attempt is made to begin a discussion of a theory of the interaction around joke telling with an emphasis on the process of telling a joke. The main study was concentrated on the content. The author believes that the social interaction around joke telling gives valuable information about the clinical interaction in joke telling, and is in many ways the same. Freud discussed both the content and process of jokes in his 1905 work, but gave far more attention to content. The area of process needs more exploration. Both content and process can and should be analyzed in clinical practice.

Position of Joke Teller and Listener. Although the main purpose of this study has been to examine the narrative content of jokes for psychoanalytic insight, the question of the position of the joke teller and the position of the listener is also important in understanding jokes and the clinical application of the theory. The joke, the teller, and the listener are distinguishable, but a discussion of one tends to bring in the other. Viewed from a very basic perspective the joker is active and the listener is passive. Freud's view was that the creation of the joke, the telling, the appreciation, and the butt of the joke, involved at least three people; and it was through this total process that instinctual gratification was gained.⁴⁶

The joker causes something to happen to the listener; the joke can cause excitement, amusement, satisfaction, and stimulation. The joker, then, is in a phallic, aggressive, or nurturant position or role. He is gratifying the listener, giving something, stimulating feeling, satisfying needs. The listener, on the other hand, is in a passive and receptive mode. He is being entertained,

⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1960).

stimulated, fed, or in some cases, shocked and attacked. Jokes are sometimes hostile to the listener or, like tickling and teasing, can be a combination of pleasurable excitement and painful excitement. The joker can be a pleasant entertainer or a sadistic tease.

The satisfactions for the joker are exhibitionistic in part; he can enjoy being the center of attention, to cause excitement by showing something. Freud and others have shown that there is satisfaction in the joke itself, but we might add that there is satisfaction in the interpersonal transaction. Both joker and listener can enjoy something that has nothing to do with the actual content of the joke, but has to do with the transaction of telling and hearing.

The listener is passive and can enjoy having something done for him. A joke requires work to formulate, and to relate this work is a gift to the audience. The listener can relax, regress, and have pleasure. The joker, on the other hand, can enjoy a feeling of power, control, creativity, and status. The joker can enjoy the act of stimulating the listener; he will also be able to bask in the approval and affirmation of worth that he receives. When we think of the pleasure a child has when the adult reads him a story, it is comparable to the pleasure of hearing a good joke. There is a pleasure, also, for the teller, but it is an active pleasure.

Some of this became clear to me in considering the analysis of a man who related memories of his own joke telling. When he was a little boy, he discovered that some times when he said "dirty words," the adults would laugh; he enjoyed this. Later, when he heard dirty stories from the neighborhood children he would tell them at dinner, in an ingenuous way, as though he really didn't understand them. His parents would first laugh and then scold him in a rather perfunctory way. It was clear they enjoyed the stories. He felt a sense of power from being able to excite and upset people.

When people laugh, especially if they laugh uproariously, there is a quality of helpless letting go. They are vulnerable and open. They have been touched in an unambiguous way. One of the pleasures of the joker, then, is this power to stimulate and produce a response. Jokers have a variety of personal fantasies about how they use their power, ranging from aggressive to sexual themes. The old statement of the performer comes to mind, "I had the audience in the palm of my hand."

A case can be made that jokes can contain wisdom and that sometimes they illustrate points of view very well; I hope to make this clear, later. If this is the case, the joker is like the teacher, or priest, in that he is communicating insight. The special form of

the joke gives a certain advantage in terms of the accessibility of the point or message. There are also certain drawbacks. There is an interesting paradox in jokes. Since the joke is not serious, it tends to be dismissed as a carrier of insight, but on the other hand, it is not resisted because it entertains. Because people automatically expect pleasure and dependency gratification from jokes they are very open and welcoming to the content. The joke, unlike a lesson in school, is fun and so it has a seductive charm in the presentation of its content. It is easily remembered also.

Although the dream is not easily remembered, there is a similarity between jokes and dreams. They both stand close to the unconscious. Some works of art and some plays, movies, and stories also have this quality. The joke can slip in its message painlessly, pleasurable, and since we are only "kidding" rather irrational and/or outrageous themes can be considered with little conscious anxiety.

A joke can be a way to speak to the unconscious with little or no involvement of the critical intellectual functions of the listener. The message is received but the joke is dismissed as not serious, like the dream. Often, in psychotherapy, a patient will tell a joke that he expects will not be taken seriously, that is, that it will not be analyzed for personal meaning. These jokes often

express important meaning for the treatment. Similarly, a therapist should never assume he can tell a joke as a social experience; the joke will very likely have various levels of meaning, which will also be taken in, unconsciously, by the patient.

Another aspect of the difference between the joker and the listener is analagous to the active versus passive roles. The joker takes responsibility for the content of the joke and the listener can be free from responsibility (unless the listener is the joker's therapist). This is important in jokes with a lot of forbidden gratification. The listener can enjoy the joke because someone else "did" it and told it. Like the parents of the patient mentioned earlier, the joke can be enjoyed first and then disapproved of, for sake of decorum, if necessary.

The surprise ending of jokes also frees the listener of guilt. If the joke has forbidden content in the surprise ending, the gratification occurs quickly before the listener has a chance to protest or evaluate. The pleasure was, so to speak, thrust upon the listener who had no chance to object, and hence, is blameless.

The good joker accepts his responsibility. He is completely secure in his "evil." He makes no apology and has no shame. The good joker will assume all of the blame for the forbidden activity. This increases the pleasure of the listener. The joker accepts all the guilt.

A good joker also has the appearance of someone who is not excited by the joke himself. Bob Hope is a good example of this. He tells jokes with a "poker face." That is, he seems unmoved by what he is saying. He is under absolute control. The good joker is then, under complete control. This allows the listener to lose control, regress, and enjoy themselves. The reassurance to the listener is that someone remains in control, the joker, to see that safety is maintained. Like the child with a dependable parent, the listener can let go of controls.

The good joker, then, is similar to the good psychoanalyst where exactly the same thing occurs. The analyst maintains his control and composure regardless of the loss of control of the analysand. The patient can be seductive, enraged, excited, depressed, or whatever is necessary. The analyst maintains his own control as a safety line to the patient. The patient would not be free to regress or experience irrationality unless the analyst takes responsibility for maintaining his own control and objectivity. The analyst, however, does not tell jokes.

If the analyst were a more "real person" and showed feeling the patient would (correctly) assume that he (the patient) should maintain his own control so that there would always be someone to ward off dangerous impulses.

Use of Jokes in Psychotherapy. A clear understanding of the various levels of meaning in jokes is a necessary condition to using jokes in psychotherapy or psychoanalysis. If jokes are seen as only resistance or socializing, then the therapist will want to pass over them, with perhaps an interpretation about resistance, and "get down to work" in treatment. The error in this may be that the joke contains some significant material for the treatment and should be analyzed. By far, the largest proportion of activity regarding jokes in psychotherapy will occur in analyzing the jokes that the patient brings to the treatment, and the jokes the therapist thinks of in his own free association, although there may also be a proper time for a joke from the therapist. It is clear that the attitude of the therapist toward the joke will, from the very beginning, affect the nature and quantity of jokes presented in treatment. For example, if upon hearing a joke told by a patient, the therapist has a sour attitude and dismisses the joke as a waste of time, or resistance, he is not likely to hear another one very soon.

The technique for jokes should be the same as the one for dreams or any other material that is a potentially rich source of meaning. It is best to adopt an approach that does not ward off this material. The analytic attitude toward dreams is a useful model for jokes, too.

Although the analyst wants to be neutral in regard to material presented, it is also true that he is interested in hearing dreams. Therefore, the skillful analyst lets it be known that dreams are welcome without making them a big issue between the patient and analyst. The guidance given by the analyst toward helpful material, through questions, interpretations, and tone of voice, is a subtle phenomenon, and requires great tact. The notion of complete neutrality, in regard to what is presented by the patient, is thought to be the ideal, but in actuality it is neither possible nor entirely good. We, as therapists, indicate our interests by our questions, comments, interpretations, and reactions. In the analytic style of treatment, great tact is used to lower this effect to an irreducible minimum.

I have found that if one wants to attend to the material in jokes in treatment, one must react with some form of mild appreciation or interest in the joke first, and after that suggest that the joke can be analyzed. If this is not done, the therapist will cause a narcissistic blow to the patient and will not hear jokes in the future. It is not necessary to react strongly; a slight smile or a small chuckle is often the right note. If this appreciation is immediately followed by the suggestion to analyze the joke, or by an interpretation of the meaning in terms personal to the patient, the serious feeling of the treatment

is maintained. The patient will learn that everything can be used to understand oneself.

On the other hand, the therapist is wise to not overreact to the joke or tell one in return. This is not analytic; it makes the treatment superficial and reduces its seriousness. There may be a time and place for the therapist to tell a joke or story, but not in response to one told by the patient. When the patient tells a joke the therapist should probably be thinking about what the joke means in terms of its content and what it means in the transference. The patient will almost always tell a joke as resistance, but if the therapist responds as I have indicated, it will deepen the treatment. Very often transference reactions are unconsciously expressed either in the joke or by telling the joke. Therefore, it is necessary to examine both the content and the process. It should be noted that if the style of analysis gives the feeling that jokes are bad, a less helpful therapeutic alliance develops.

In dealing with counter transference, the therapist should ask himself what his reaction is to joke telling in general and the specific joke in particular. The meanings are diverse depending on the actual content and presentation. Most therapists have heard "psychiatrist" jokes. These mostly signal transference reactions.

Earlier, I talked about the attitudes of the joker and the listener, the active and passive roles. With the therapist as listener, the picture is a little different. If the therapist is used to jokes, then a watchful interpretive mood will prevail. If the therapist isn't skilled at joke interpretation or thinks they are all resistance, then his attitude will be one of annoyance, or impatience. He won't have the expectation of pleasure as with the standard audience attitude. The therapist who is skilled in jokes will probably feel an attitude of pleasure in the joke plus a feeling of satisfaction at recognizing the important material.

Recalling the discussion earlier of the motivation in telling jokes, the joke teller is being seductive, phallic, nurturant, aggressive, or anal. Many patients tell a joke to be liked by the therapist. Very often they wish to be liked as a peer, or more often, wish to achieve unconscious aims toward the therapist. By following my suggestion to first show some interested reaction, a rejection and narcissistic injury is avoided; and there is a friendlier feeling. The therapist should maintain this mood while helping the patient analyze the content of the joke and the transference aims, to whatever degree is appropriate to the patient at that time in the treatment. Of course, not every detail of interpretation is necessary

or wise in every instance; as with dream interpretation, the stage of the treatment and the ego strength must be considered.

After this has been done, if it is done reasonably well, the patient will think jokes are appropriate to treatment, even if they show unconscious and perhaps unflattering things. The patient will not see the therapist as a disapproving, morally superior individual, and the patient will have the satisfaction of having done some good analytic work with the therapist. This strengthens the therapeutic alliance.

Male therapists dealing with male patients perhaps draw on a culturally sanctioned form of closeness between men. In the armed services, in athletics, and various men's clubs it is common for men to tell jokes. This often produces a feeling of mutual support and closeness. The male therapist uses this cultural institution in a special way. He does not enter it fully as a peer, but he uses some of this mood to foster the therapeutic alliance. The further step of fostering an analytic attitude about the material and the interaction is what keeps the situation from becoming social or an acting out form of resistance. Differences between men and women are discussed later.

The posture suggested here of a mildly interested attitude toward jokes can have a therapeutic effect on

certain patients beyond the benefits already discussed of analyzing the content and the transference. There are patients who have a great deal of trouble with the superego and who continue to struggle with a puritanical attitude even after much analytic work is done. For some of these people, jokes with sexual content can have a beneficial effect on their prolonged struggle against the archaic parts of the superego. An example of a patient of mine illustrates this point. This male patient had a very strong archaic superego in which all sexual activity with another person was not permitted. He was very prim in his speech, behavior, and thoughts. As the analysis of his repressive background began to loosen the hold of the archaic superego, he began to listen to, and later, to tell dirty jokes with his male friends. This was something entirely new for him. He began also to tell these jokes in treatment. He was already an adult of mature years, but he had never lived through a period of development common to male adolescents in America in which dirty jokes are told. This period is one in which the peer group gives support and consensual validation to the overthrow of superego parts that are too sexually repressive to be appropriate to adult life. He later said of this experience that telling jokes "made sex less frightening;" it gives the impression that "everybody does it, it's no big thing." He said that jokes made sex

into a "truer perspective to other parts of life." It is best that the jokes come from peers and the patient, not the therapist.

Another issue that is similar is the area of rigidity and regression. There are some patients who have difficulty in experiencing regression in a positive way. In analytic style treatment it is necessary that patients temporarily set aside defenses to permit a controlled, partial, and reversible regression in the service of insight. It is in a state of this regression that real feeling and vivid contact with unconscious fantasies takes place; otherwise, the "insight" remains rather intellectual. Extremely frightened or rigid people have great difficulty in letting go to experience this therapeutic state. Jokes play a small part in giving the ego more flexibility and tolerance for regression. Jokes, according to Freud, involve a rapid contact with the unconscious, and I would add that this produces a very brief regression of the ego to a stage of being able to enjoy some rather archaic id satisfactions. This is all "in fun" and not serious and very temporary. It is a miniaturization of the similar rather longer temporary regression in treatment. The repeated experience of very brief contact with the unconscious and the concomitant extremely brief regression can have a cumulative effect

on some people, making them more flexible, especially those for whom experience in treatment has already prepared the ground. This cumulative effect is similar to the effect, discussed earlier, of the gradual modifying of the patient's archaic superego through the erosion of repeated joke telling among peers. In this instance, however, the point is made that jokes can play a small role in accustoming the person to brief regressions which are safe and reversible.

In analytic treatment, or other "uncovering" treatment, regression is used to promote familiarity with the irrational thoughts and feelings. As feelings become more conscious, the person begins to experience a greater perspective on them. It is this perspective that one thinks of as a "mature outlook" or a "philosophical" viewpoint. Jokes can play a small role in this too. The jokes should come from the patient.

There are many jokes that contain wisdom and encourage a mature view of life problems; they are not necessarily in the majority, however, as many jokes are merely crude or silly. We are used to thinking of the humorous stories of Mark Twain, Shalom Alechem, and others, as having wisdom. Some jokes also contain it. The idea of perspective or a philosophical view of life implies that one views one's own problems with less narcissism and with more balance.

There are a couple of humorous sayings that illustrate this point. These sayings are usually given to people in the spirit of a recommendation during a time of stress or crisis: "The first 100 years are the hardest," or "In a hundred years who will know the difference?"

A corollary point to perspective in jokes is that at the same time that a joke increases perspective, it is likely to reduce narcissism. In the act of taking a more detached, balanced view of problems it is more difficult to see ones own needs or problems as the center of everything. Certain jokes, like certain stories, then, foster an interest in other people and a sympathy for mankind. It should be said, however, that no recommendation is being made for promoting these jokes; to push them would be inspirational and instructional and run contrary to the goal of uncovering feelings and thoughts. If the joke comes from the patient, however, it might very well be a sign of reduced narcissism or increased maturity.

Although it is not recommended that jokes or parables be told often or told for inspirational or exhorting purposes, there is a time when a joke told by the therapist can be useful. The more analytic, uncovering, or "non-directive" the therapy the less the therapist would be likely to tell a story or joke. Occasionally, a joke can be told as an "interpretation."

The following is an example of the use of a joke in psychotherapy. But first, a patient has the following dream:

"I am sneaking outside to get in my Porsche. I am going to quietly start the car without being detected. I look back and there is my mother, peering in the window."

The patient had some associations to the dream leading to some of his thoughts about what the dream could mean. (This patient has been in analytic psychotherapy for several years.) He said he wants control over his life but feels his mother tries to take it away from him. She tries to control and supervise him all the time. The patient had the thought that he was guilty about his sexual activities and ashamed to enjoy being seen in his Porsche--girls look at him when he is driving his car. He tries to get away from mother but she is onto him all the time.

I told the following joke that his dream and associations brought to my mind.

Joke: An English Lord was being attended by his valet in the morning while getting up. The valet noticed that the man had an erection and said, "Your Lordship has an erection. Shall I inform her Ladyship?" The Lord replied, "No, Joseph, just get my baggy trousers. I think we'll smuggle this one out."

In this joke "Her Ladyship" is a superego figure carefully monitoring the activities of her husband. The

husband is trying to avoid her control by stealth. His attitude indicates that she is a very strong, formidable superego person. There is a further implication that the man's penis is the woman's property or that she has the right to control it. She can demand sex from him whenever she wants to.

This joke fits the mother of the patient very well. The mother is a puritanical, hysteric, fundamentalist Christian who is "seductive" with her son, and very possessive. She doesn't want him to marry, have a girl, or engage in sex in any way. She has actually looked in his windows to see what he is up to.

The Lord in the joke is afraid of the power of his wife, but even so, he tries to get around her. His use of stealth is an ego function. He appears to be refreshingly free of guilt. He will smuggle it out if he can and get out of the sexual control of his wife.

The patient, on the other hand, is guilty about sex and frightened of his superego. His guilt about looking attractive in his Porsche is due to his desire to leave mother for other women, his desire for sex, and, at a deeper level, his desire to look good to his mother.

The joke fostered associations to these themes and increased his perspective on the problem. The joke might be viewed as an elaborate "interpretation."

This is another example of a joke told in treatment to a different patient. The background is as follows: This single man had been in treatment for many years and has been struggling to understand and change a symbiotic relationship with his mother (who was now dead) and his father with whom he still resided. The patient had made very slow, but tangible, progress in overcoming his dependency and getting out into the world, but it was still a very serious problem. In the treatment session under consideration the patient spoke again of his attachment to his father and how he was afraid to go out on his own. He was also afraid his father would be lost without him. The patient then referred to treatment and wondered if a vacation from treatment would be appropriate. I said that I thought a vacation could be appropriate under the right circumstances. The patient then spoke of an ideal of his: Indian boys, before they become members of the adult male group, go out into the wilderness alone to test themselves and to seek their totem animal, which becomes part of their new adult identity. I said I understood his wish to have a vacation from treatment in this way and that it had merit. I also raised the question, however, which separation should come first? Should he live away from his father and get his own apartment before or after a vacation from treatment? The patient thought it was more

logical to leave home first. I said his Indian metaphor reminded me of a joke.

Joke: An Indian boy was going out into the wilderness alone to test himself to achieve manhood. As he was walking along a mountain trail, he turned a corner right into the arms of a huge bear. The bear hugged him in a big bear hug, tighter and tighter until he feared for his life. In desperation the Indian boy used his wits and reached down and gave the bear's penis a huge yank. The bear in great surprise opened his arms, and the boy ran and ran and ran. When the boy reached the mountain top across the valley, he stopped running and looked back. The bear was still standing there, way back in the same place, and the bear was making big gestures with his paw and arm, meaning, "Come on back, come on back."

The patient understood the joke as I do, as a reference to his father, the bear who doesn't want him to leave. And, also, as my being in sympathy with his need to be like an Indian boy. The most important communication, however, has to do with the transference. I make clear that unlike the father, I am willing to let him go when he's ready. I am not like the bear or father. I could see separation as appropriate and useful. The telling of a joke can communicate that one understands the various meanings of the joke. The effect of this was seen in

subsequent sessions where the attachment to me and treatment was taken on by the patient as his wish, and not projected as being my wish.

Consider this example which is not from my own practice. This joke was told to a patient by his analyst during an analytic session in which the patient was experiencing a great deal of trouble in telling an incident in his history of which he was very ashamed. The patient had been repeating the statement that it was very hard to tell what he had on his mind.

Joke: Two Jewish ladies who were long time friends were visiting one day when the first lady began expressing the desire to tell a secret about herself about which she was quite worried and upset. She said over and over in a worried way, "Oh, I just can't tell you this, I just can't." After a long period of hand wringing and doubt, the lady finally confessed to her friend that her secret was that she had somehow spontaneously began growing a penis. When the second lady finally heard this, she said, "Oh, and what else is new?"

The person who reported this to me was the patient, and he said that he experienced this joke as a reassurance that his disclosure would not upset or shock his analyst. He was able to tell his secret after that. An argument could be made that reassurance is not analytic and that

it would be better technique to analyze the resistance by having the patient express his fears about revealing himself until he had insight into the unconscious component of his fear of disclosure.

By analyzing the joke further, we might have a better understanding of this interchange.

Analysis: From a point of view of the id, this joke is predominately aggressive or hostile. The first lady is an object of ridicule and is injured with the defect of a penis growing on her body. Also, it could be argued that the second lady takes a very indifferent attitude which further belittles. The second lady can be seen as being in a superego role. She can judge whether her friend looks good or bad in this circumstance. As a superego figure, she takes a paradoxical position. She either doesn't care, or accepts without criticism (the analyst's position). The patient experienced it in the second way and felt that the therapeutic alliance was strengthened. It is possible to view the joke as an interpretation and as an analysis of resistance. The analyst could well be saying in effect, "You (patient) are acting like the first lady because of your fears of the superego (the first part of the joke), while in reality I (the analyst) am like the second lady in the humorous twist of the ending." Potentially, the surprise ending

can throw into sharp contrast the two views of the superego and go quickly and directly to the unconscious fantasy of the superego. If this joke is fully successful as an interpretation, the patient would not only tell his secret, but he would also go on to recover unconscious attitudes about significant superego figures. If the further analysis of the superego doesn't occur, the criticism about too much reassurance would seem to be more correct.

It is possible that a joke told as an interpretation has a greater impact. This question would make an excellent subject for another study. Gerald Caplan in his book on mental health consultation makes a very interesting statement in this regard. He recommends the use of "parables" in consultation as a means "to talk directly to the unconscious," bypassing the conscious ego processes. Caplan's purpose here is to make interpretations to another professional without seeming to do so.⁴⁷ I do not agree with the ethics or wisdom of this device, but it makes a point about his idea of parables, which are, like jokes, little stories. He cites the use of parables in history by religious and other leaders to impart an idea strongly and vividly. Caplan thinks the parable has

⁴⁷ Gerald Caplan, The Theory and Practice of Mental Health Consultation. (New York: Basic Books, 1967).

a great emotional impact. The use of jokes, parables, or historic events to illustrate points, instruct, inspire, or interpret is worthy of further attention. The more directive the treatment the more these methods would be used.

One is familiar with the parent, minister, teacher, or therapist, who is always telling parables and personal history to document advice to the subject person, client, student, or child. These lectures soon become tiresome, predictable, and ultimately, ineffective through repetition and the attempt to dominate. This can be contrasted to the posture of the non-directive therapist who avoids this approach. A joke, parable, or piece of personal experience, told by a more analytically oriented therapist, will have great impact, partly because of the novelty of this experience to the patient. Hence, it would be best to have these experiences be rare and very well chosen.

The therapist can choose his timing carefully for special occasions when some more powerful effect is desired. This is a good device best kept in reserve for times of special need. Because jokes can be viewed by the audience as a gift, the therapist can also choose to "reward" or nurture the patient under special circumstances. If used with great restraint and awareness of the counter-transference, these gifts could help the treatment through

a crisis. The value of some jokes is that the communication is complex; the joke could, at one level be a gift or a reward to the patient, and at another level be an interpretation or an exhortation to more mature functioning. The most inspired joke choices work positively at several levels. The following, although not necessarily inspired, is an example of a complex transaction.

A patient, who had been in treatment for a long time, had a long standing, fixed, and severe passive-dependent character trait, and always asked for advice as a part of his trait, got into a heated discussion with me about whether he was "entitled" to advice because I was the "expert." His treatment had accomplished a great deal toward undermining and understanding his passive, dependent character trait, and so this session was a crucial one, approaching a point of insight and change. The patient was able to feel and admit a very strong wish for advice and to see and acknowledge a number of ways he tried to manipulate me into advising him. He also could intellectually state that he must be the final judge of the advice and take responsibility for the choices he made. He could see this contrast in himself between the passive wish and the needs of reality. He didn't like it. He longed for an advisor who was infallible. I told him that such an advisor would, in fantasy, be his mother and that to enjoy

being directed by her he would remain a child. He became very depressed and expressed regret about this state of affairs. I told the following joke, at which he laughed and seemed to gain some perspective.

Joke: A successful man with a happy home life and a good business was looking back over his life and trying to assess the meaningful influences on him. He recalled the rabbi who trained him for his Bar Mitzvah and the wonderful advice he received. He recalled the wonderful advice which became his guiding star: "Life is like a fountain . . ." The man was sure this guiding principle was responsible for all his success in life. He resolved to go back to his old home town temple and thank the rabbi for his advice. When he returned there he found that the rabbi didn't really remember him. After all, he must have trained hundreds of boys through the years! The man was understanding of this and chatted with the rabbi awhile. He then asked him, "By the way, could you tell me a little more about what it means that "Life is like a fountain?" The rabbi looked a little befuddled and moved his hands around like falling water. He seemed to be searching for the words to express himself. Finally, the rabbi said, "Well, maybe life is like a fountain. Maybe it isn't. Who knows?"

In this joke I am responding to the patient's great sense of loss. He can't get the kind of help he wants from

me or his mother. By telling him a joke I am rewarding him for the hard work he did in the session to arrive at the painful insight he gained. At the same time I am underlining and reinforcing the insight: One cannot really depend on advice, "superego" people are fallible, too. The joke also gives the patient back something for what he lost. The patient has a connection with the people in the joke, a shared pain, a kind of companionship. His sense of perspective can be increased and his sense of narcissism decreased. Other people suffer as he does, and they survive.

So far, the discussion has not considered if differences exist between men and women in relation to humor. This very important subject is dealt with in a chapter by Paul McGhee.⁴⁸ The chapter is well written and utilizes many studies to document its conclusions. The orientation of the book and the documenting studies utilizes a sociological and phenomenological method rather than a psychoanalytic and deductive one. The author says,

"It is proposed here that a clearly definable set of sex-role standards regarding humor exists for males and females in our culture. Most important along these lines is the expectation that males should be initiators of humor, while females should be responders. It is proposed that the

⁴⁸ Paul McGhee, "The Role of Laughter and Humor in Growing Up Female," Becoming Female: Perspectives on Development, ed. Claire Kopp, (Plenum Press, 1979).

use of humor in interpersonal interaction serves as a means of gaining or maintaining dominance or control over the social situation. Because of the power associated with the successful use of humor, humor initiation has become associated with other traditionally masculine characteristics, such as aggressiveness, dominance, and assertiveness. For a female to develop into a clown or joker, then, she must violate the behavioral pattern normally reserved for women."⁴⁹

These ideas are in harmony with statements made in this present study in regard to the subject of the motivations of the joke teller and listener. The emphasis, however, is different. McGhee stresses the power of the joke teller in a social situation, while this present study stresses the aspects of passivity and dependency versus aggression, from a more psychoanalytic posture and from a point of view of the inner experience. McGhee cites a study, for example, that shows in a hospital staff meeting how the male doctors tell the jokes and the female nurses and staff do the laughing. He views this in terms of status and sexual role identification rather than from the point of view of inner psychic structure.

McGhee documents the prevalence of self-deprecating humor in women. They show a preference for this humor more than men. One finds in this an interesting parallel to the statements of Theodore Reik about Jewish wit. Reik thinks that Jews prefer self-deprecating humor for a complex of reasons stemming from their social status. McGhee also

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 187.

cites studies which purport to show that girls with a poor home environment can become jokers more like the males of their own age group. He thinks Freud's concept of aggression in joking is the explanation for this. The girls are in need of expressing more than a conventional amount of anger.

McGhee does not believe there is any natural or inherent difference between men and women with regard to humor but that these roles and attitudes are imposed by the culture from early childhood. The present study does not attempt to describe the differences in using jokes clinically as it relates to the sex of the therapist and patient. How the sex of the therapist and patient affects the clinical situation in regard to jokes would be a good topic for a new study. McGhee's findings suggest that differences would be present but that they would be of cultural rather than biological origin.

Countertransference. As the therapist listens to the talk of the patient, he is also attending to his own thoughts which are going on at the same time. These thoughts are of various kinds. Obviously, the most common thoughts are those about what the patient is saying and the resultant thoughts about what one can understand about it, and what to say and what not to say. One has a variety of mental associations to the productions of the patient. Sometimes

these can be jokes. If there is time to do so the therapist can try to understand why the particular joke is coming into his mind. Various questions can be asked: Is countertransference involved? Is the joke illustrating a point? Is the therapist bored and wanting diversion, etc.? If the joke has an excellent application to what the patient is saying, the joke can be told to illustrate the point. Or more often, a more conservative approach is used in which the insights of the joke are employed without telling the joke. When, for example, a "punch line" to a joke nags at the edges of consciousness, it is wise to ask what the meaning is rather than trying to discipline one's thoughts back to the matter at hand. These random thoughts can sometimes give valuable clues to countertransference and/or an understanding of what the patient is saying at a more profound or complex level. The following is an example. I was listening to a male patient talk at great length about his wife. He obsessively listed her virtues and faults repeatedly. He seemed to avoid expressing his real feelings or to confront deeper issues. The punch line to a joke kept coming to me. Upon examination, it made an interesting comment on the situation of the patient.

Joke: A man was brought into court on a charge of shooting his wife. The judge asked him why he did it and the man explained that last Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday

night he came home from work at the regular time. His dinner was ready on the table as usual, but his wife was not waiting for him as usual inasmuch as she was in the next room in bed with the man from next door. On Thursday night he came home and shot his wife. The judge asked, "Was she in bed with the neighbor?" The man said, "Yes, but also there was no dinner on the table. What kind of a wife doesn't fix dinner?"

I did not tell this joke, but it reinforced my understanding that I thought this patient not only had a lot of murderous anger, but also, that he really didn't care for his wife as a person. He cared for her only as someone who could do things for him. I concluded that I was thinking of the joke as a comment about him. As a result, I then wondered aloud with the patient if his long story didn't keep him from what he was feeling about his wife and if he were not somewhat "annoyed." He was able after that to express more of his "disappointment" with her, without the compensatory balance of her list of virtues.

The use of jokes for their value in informing us about our countertransference feelings is one of their most important uses, just as important as interpreting the jokes brought in by the patient. The therapist, by attending to his own associations and armed with a comprehensive theory can discover a great deal from the jokes or punch lines that

come to his mind while doing treatment. The telling of jokes to patients is not advised except in very rare circumstances involving difficult situations requiring some special reinforcement or intervention. Generally, the more non-directive the treatment, the less jokes would be appropriate.

Any treatment characterized by the frequent use of jokes, wit, and/or good humored banter by the therapist should be carefully evaluated, inasmuch as it is likely that the therapist is operating with unexamined counter-transference, or is incompetent or inexperienced.

The jokes that patients bring to treatment can be analyzed for their potentially rich content; however, a therapeutic alliance suitable to such analysis must be carefully fostered, and a comprehensive theory of jokes should be used.

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