

The Father

Introduction

This is a set of instructions for gaining access to the unconscious thoughts and feelings one has towards one's father.

Psychologically speaking, this game has much in common with projective tests like the Rorschach-test or the Thematic Apperception Test developed by Henry A. Murray. The main difference in method is the usage of a group, rather than an individual, as the entity doing the projection. In this game, three persons use their unconscious and conscious minds to create a tragic story about one of the most important things in a person's life; the relation to a husband or a father.

I'm mostly inspired by other games such as Magnus Jakobsson's *Until we sink* and Lasse Lundin's *It wasn't me*, in addition to the wonderful style in all games by Tomas H.V. Mørkrid.

I have deliberately given this game a somewhat vague structure. In order to lure out hidden conceptions, the game gives the participants a large amount of leeway in deciding what happens. As Freud once said: The ultimate psychological test is to give someone a blank sheet of paper and ask them what they see.

The course of the game

The game is made for three people and takes place around a table with four chairs. One of the chairs is empty, and here one imagines that the Father would sit. The three participants take on the roles of Mother, Son and Daughter. The game should take about an hour to play. The game is about killing a father, and inevitably ends with a murder.

The game has five parts. In each part, the participants do something to push the story of a father's death forward. The first part is introduction and choosing of roles. The second part is the introduction scene. The third part consists of flashback scenes. The fourth part is the prelude and the fifth and final part is the aftermath. Each part of the game has its own instructions. It is not necessary to prepare anything before starting the game, and the game can be played straight from the instructions. However, there are some tips on playing this kind of game at the end of these instructions, tips that are useful if one has never played this kind of game before.

Playing the game

Most of the game will be spent playing out one's role, saying what the role says and describing what he or she does. It is important that all participants understand that the game is a collaborative effort and not a competition. When a participant says something as a role, the other participants should build on what was said instead of trying to negate it or coming up with something completely different. See the tips at the end of the instructions for more on this.

There are no strict rules to establish what happens in the game; in the very unlikely event that two participants argue about the story instead of building on each other's inputs, something has gone wrong in the dynamics of the group. Most groups quickly accustom to building on and respecting each other's ideas and get a very smooth game.

Part one: Introduction and choosing of roles.

First, all participants skim the rules and try to get familiar with what kind of a game they're about to play. Those who have played similar games before may explain a bit, but all participants should try not to have too many expectations for the game.

Then, one chooses roles. There are three roles in this game: The Son, The Daughter and The Mother. One chooses randomly who plays what. When the participants have received their roles, spend a little time in silence to reflect on the role and on this role's many possible relationships with the Father. The roles are all assumed to be old enough to make a difference, with the exact age being up to the participants.

Then, a murderer is randomly chosen. One of the participants will play a role who will murder a father; the father of her children in the case of the Mother, and one's own father in the case of the Son and the Daughter.

The two participants who are not the murderer get two different tasks. The one sitting to the right of the murderer has the task of trying to make the father's actions seem reasonable and fair. The one sitting to the left of the murderer has the task of trying to make the father's actions seem rash, unfair or even evil. This task is given to the participant, and not the role he or she plays. This is very important, as a role may very well be hostile to the father while the participant playing the role is trying to make the father seem reasonable. The participants given the tasks of making the father look good or bad should try and drive the scenes towards their respective goals and build on and give attention to ideas that support their goals. An interesting part of the game is to find out whether the Father really deserves to be killed, to find out whether the murderer is a deranged killer or a hero.

Part two: The introduction scene.

In the introduction scene and all later scenes, the participants act out their roles. Much like actors on a stage or on film, they say what the role says. However, since the game takes place around a table, one does not physically act out, but rather describe what the roles do.

The introduction scene takes place in twilight. The light fades, and all three roles are gathered. The Father is not present in this scene, or in any other scene in the game. The introduction scene can be thought of as the present, the point from which the flashback scenes are past and the prelude scenes are future.

The Father can be played in all kinds of settings, and the introduction scene decides what this setting will be. Some groups like to briefly discuss the setting before play begins, and others like to just improvise and let the setting grow from the interaction in the first scene. However, the game is not about setting but about the relations between family members. Don't make elaborate statements about fantastic worlds. The simplest way to play is to play an average family in your home country, present day.

Part three: The flashbacks

In this part of the game, the two participants who do not play the murderer take turns drawing a card from the deck of flashback-cards, and describe a scene inspired by the word on the card. Then, the participants play out their roles. The scene ends when the participants feel like ending it, and it doesn't have to last more than a few minutes. It's supposed to be a brief flashback to an important moment in the family's history.

When describing a scene, give a general description of what the roles are doing. All three roles are present in all scenes, and the Father is never present. The scene must focus on the roles; try to avoid scenes where other persons than the roles might play an important role. Create scenes where the three roles have just experienced or are about to experience something. It's not necessary to play out the scenes in chronological order; a scene taking place when the Son and the Daughter are young children can be played after a scene where they are adolescents.

It's good to build on previous flashback scenes when creating and playing the scenes. Try not to create too many separate storylines that need resolving.

Play flashback scenes until you have a good idea of the family's previous history. Four to eight scenes are probably enough.

Example: Erlend, playing the Son and sitting to the left of the murderer (thus trying to cast the father in a bad light), draws the card 'The House'. He thinks for a moment, and then briefly describes the scene:

We are outside of the old house, and we have moved all our stuff out. The house is about to be sold. Dad has left to spend the money on starting a new business. My sister and I are young, but not too young to resent leaving the house we've spent all our lives in. Andrea, playing the Daughter and the murderer, says 'I guess that's it. That was the last of my toys.' Liv, playing the Mother and sitting to the right of the murderer (thus trying to cast the father in a good light) says 'Don't worry. It's gonna be all right. In just a few years we'll be living in another house much better than this, it's just gonna be a little time in a small apartment while your father and I get things together.' The participants play out the scene until they feel like they've explored the situation.

Part four: the Prelude

After the flashbacks, the story continues from the introduction scene. The two participants who are not the murderer again take turns drawing cards and setting scenes. The prelude scenes are different in three ways: First, the scenes must be played in chronological order. Second, the scene cards are much stricter, and allow for less variation in the scenes. Third, not all three roles have to be present at the scenes. These scenes push mercilessly towards the killing of the Father. Make sure that each scene leads directly up to the murder.

The scenes should be fast and emotional. Don't be afraid to push the other participants. Each scene is over when the participants feel that the card the scene was based on has been resolved.

There are five cards with prelude scenes. Draw and play four of these. The last prelude scene ends just before the murder.

Part five: the Aftermath

The last prelude-scene ended with the killer going off to do his or her dark deed. The murder itself is not played out, but left to be discussed.

The Aftermath is the last scene in the game, and it should be brief and painful. The scene is played out much like the introduction scene, but instead of twilight, it is dark—maybe night or in a room with no windows.

After the game

Each story told using these instructions will be unique, a product of the group's ideas about the Father and about the roles they play. Some games will be humorous, filled with bad jokes and seemingly going no deeper than the average sitcom, while others will be quiet and intense. It's impossible to end the game without having made a story, and it may be interesting to spend a few minutes discussing the way people interacted and how the story turned out.

Tips on playing this game

If you haven't played roleplaying games before: This game is played by taking on a role and acting it out, and that's really all there is to it. If you can imagine being someone's son, daughter or mother then you know how to play this game. If you've just picked up these instructions on the Web or from a book and don't know how to play, just sit down and play. You'll find that taking on a role and improvising a story

comes naturally and easily. Just keep in mind the tips below, and you'll have about an hour of good, low-key, human tragedy.

Accept and build on ideas: This is the most important thing to keep in mind when playing. If another participant comes up with an idea, build on it and go with it, and don't always try to come up with your own ideas and push them. Some people seem to think that the more new ideas they come up with, the better they are at role-playing. That's not the case, this isn't a competition, relax and build on what the other two participants say.

Stay focused: This game only takes an hour. Get in the game, stay in the game for an hour, get out. Don't start to do something other than playing. If all participants are focused, you'll have a great game. If one participant loses focus, the game suffers.

Keep it real: The game is about a family and their tragedy. While it may be fun to spin wild ideas and create a crazy story, the game really works best when it's down-to-earth. Don't try to be creative or entertaining. Just play the role.

THE CARDS

Flashback scenes: Love, Happiness, Hatred, Secret, Journey, News, Tradition, Death, Lies, Food, Money, The House, Authority, Endurance

Prelude scenes:

The murderer tells someone about the coming murder

The murder weapon is introduced. The roles don't necessarily know that it will become a murder weapon.

The murderer experiences something bad

Two of the roles have an argument that has to do with the murderer

There is an attempt at healing something that's hurt