

EPISCRIP AND THE "HOT POTATO" GAME

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This report is a description of the episcript, which is to be distinguished both from script and counterscript.

The script is a life-plan related to an injunction from the Child in the Parent, then integrated as an "electrode" in PC, the Parent in the Child. The episcript is generated around the same time by AC, the Adult in the Child, colloquially called the "Professor." While script injunctions are being received by the Child, AC, the Professor, wishes to fight them off. Particularly he wishes to avoid the outcome belonging to a hamartic or tragic script.

The little Professor is committed to life, perhaps by instinct. He is intuitive and spunky, but does not have the experience or skill to evaluate the script. Seeking parental strokes has first priority; he cannot resist injunctions. Therefore, he resorts to magic thinking. He establishes the episcript, a secret plot based on the magic assumption that tragedy to the self can be avoided by passing it on to a sacrificial object, a victim or scapegoat. This way of thinking is amply illustrated in the myths and folklore of most cultures.

Just as the helpless child experiences his parents, so does primitive man experience the forces of nature. These forces are magical, capable of distributing bounty and also curses and destruction. In primitive culture supernatural magic is offset by man made magic. Sacrificial offerings are based on the belief that if the dangerous consequences of fate or curses can be transferred elsewhere the original bearer of the fate can be spared.

There are tales in the folklore of many nations describing how a hero (or heroine) was cursed in early childhood by a malevolent "spirit" for reasons often related to his parentage or circumstances of his birth. The curse is to take effect many years later except that due to some special quality the hero side-steps the awful fate and the consequences are carried by someone else, thereby temporarily, at least, satisfying or frustrating the demon. It is not by coincidence that this theme is a recurrent one. It persists in religious practices, prayers, rituals related to sacrificial offerings, and socially sanctioned ways of finding scapegoats. If I can pass the "evil" that is about to overtake me to someone else, I might escape the consequences. Jesus died to expiate "my" sins and thereby absolves me from ultimate punishment. For the devout Catholic He dies symbolically every day in the Mass, the proper name of which is the "Sacrifice of the Mass."

Children's play reflects this belief, probably spontaneously generated, but also reinforced by the cultural factors mentioned above. It is also reinforced by child-rearing practices. A teacher may punish one child as an "example" for the others, who escape thereby and feel "there but for the Grace of God" or a parent will blame a playmate for trouble rather than

punish his own offspring. Even reality reinforces this tendency. If a policeman following me begins to chase another car going faster than I am, I may escape a ticket. This tendency is used as a treatment method in hypnosis. The hypnotist instructs a patient to "Place the pain in the door and move it out of your arm," and the patient thereby becomes "freed" of the pain.

With the episcript a secret plan is nourished. Perhaps the script, though set up for real, can be dealt with magically by being "passed on" to someone else. The script ending becomes akin to a "hot potato." My own hands need not be burnt too badly, I hope, if I can pass it on to someone else. Hence many people with hamartic scripts desperately play the "Hot Potato Game" whereby the episcript is effected on the assumption that this is the only way to escape their own destruction.

The difference between episcript and counterscript is that the counterscript is generated by the Parent of the actual parents, whereas the episcript is generated in the AC, the Adult in the Child, of the individual. AC has intuitive awareness of the destructiveness of the script and wants to avert it by magic. The injunctions of the episcript are similar to those of the script but are applied to someone else. The implementation of the episcript is by "Child-Child" transmission, using "Hot Potato" Games such as "I'm Only Trying to Help You," "Let's You and Him Fight," and "Gee You're Wonderful."

There is evidence of episcript in most cases of hamartic script. It is often the episcript which sustains some persons prior to treatment rather than the counterscript. Sometimes episcript and counterscript alternate to defend the individual from anxiety generated by beginning awareness of the script. In my experience with some data relating to "episcript potentials" a spunky, crafty, life-driven, perhaps more intelligent spontaneous child generates a stronger episcript than a more depressed child. Thus a history of "cussedness" and rebelliousness in the childhood of the individual tends to tie in with a particular ability to implement the episcript.

Identification of the episcript is a specific lead to the script itself. Since the episcript plot is similar to the person's script, but is being "passed on" by games and overt transactions, it is closer to the surface and more visible, thus offering a way for the therapist to cross-check initial impressions about the patient's script. Also, the diagnostic pitfall of confusing script with counterscript is avoided.

There are people with a hamartic script who appear to be functioning well for certain periods without having thrown off their script or turned to counterscript. This is usually due to their having "passed on" their script (i.e. implemented their episcript). Temporarily they feel "free" of the destructive injunctions of their script. For instance, it is assumed that Alcoholics Anonymous "cures" are counterscript cures. The former alcoholic remains sober by playing Parent to a drunk's Child. This is not always the case. Sometimes Alcoholics Anonymous "cures" are due to the episcript. The

Alcoholic is "cured" by "passing on" the "Hot Potato" of unrestrained drinking to someone else. A Child-Child transmission of addiction has taken place. Here are two clinical examples.

1. A father stopped drinking to excess allegedly because of worry over his teenage son's drug addiction. Actually, he stopped drinking because the son had "taken over" the curse of addiction (accepted the father's episcrypt). When the son was cured of addiction the father became alcoholic again. The temporary relief from having passed on the hot potato was cancelled out when he got his hot potato back again. His own injunction had been: "Be addicted," and the son was now no longer carrying it out on his behalf.

2. A young man had an injunction from his mother: "Get locked up in a madhouse." He tried to implement this by using LSD, for example. The counterscript from his father's Parent was based on the precept "Work hard, be a business success." The father overworked and died in early middle-age. The young man, off drugs and exposed to TA, erroneously assumed that his script called for "working himself to death in business." He proudly decided to pursue a career in psychology, an occupation attractive to his Child, rather than business, which was attractive to his Parent. He believed he had given up his destructive script.

Actually, the script was still unknown to him, and as active as before. By working as a therapist he was attempting to offset the script by episcrypt. The secret motive for the new career was to find substitutes to "feed" to the destructive injunction, hoping to "escape" the script without resorting to counterscript. He became skillful at identifying the most likely candidates for an institutionalizable "crack-up." With them, there were "gallows-transactions" to accelerate that outcome. With others he was genuinely effective, and his new career choice seemed excellent. As with games, his Adult was unaware of the selective treatment he practiced.

The clue to the process appeared in supervision. His clinical supervisor noted that there was a strange glee on his face whenever he discussed the possibility of a "crackup" or the "madhouse" for one of his patients. The supervisor intervened and averted that outcome for one case. The subject immediately began to seek another potential entrant for the madhouse among the patients available to him. Confrontation with this pattern led to recognition of his script. He shifted back to his counterscript career choice (business) as temporarily safer, and seriously sought treatment. He remembered that his mother, an erratic woman, had, during his childhood, frequently bragged that nobody could drive her into the madhouse. Thus, his script injunction "get locked up in a madhouse" was due to her episcrypt, with which she had avoided the tragic outcome of her script. I would venture to say that some therapists, rescuers, "I'm only trying to help" game players are in this activity primarily for episcrypt purposes. Thus the high rate of suicide of allegedly successful therapists may relate to their

being ultimately too successful with their patients. When they run out of patients vulnerable to episcrpt their own hamartic script takes over for them and they commit suicide.

Whether a person seeks treatment or not, in the case of a hamartic script, is often determined by how successfully he is able to use "Hot Potato" games in transferring his script to episcrpt recipients. If he can maintain a recipient within his episcrpt or if he finds successive ones, he may not feel he needs treatment. If he fails to transfer the hot potato, or if he gets it back often, he seeks help. Unfortunately sometimes he seeks and finds help in implementing the episcrpt, rather than in giving up the script.

Clinical example: A mother kept changing the therapists from whom she sought help about her daughter's alleged misbehavior. In eight years there were twelve therapists. Examination of the timing of entrance and termination of treatment revealed a pattern. There was termination by the mother when the therapist stopped "Ain't It Awful" games and established rapport with the daughter or else when there was increased communication to the mother of what would be age-appropriate behavior in the girl. What was not dealt with, until therapist number twelve, was the mother's own suicidal script. When the girl was moody and depressed she carried the mother's episcrpt. There was hope, expressed as fear, that she might commit suicide, but at those times no treatment was sought. It was whenever the girl used resources of spontaneity to establish budding outside relationships that the mother brought her into treatment. The mother's secret purpose was to maintain the girl in a "not-OK" position. In that position the girl carried the episcrpt by being depressed; that seemed fine to the mother. Treatment was sought when the depression appeared to lift. The entering and withdrawing from treatment served the purpose first of reactivating depression in the girl by underlining her "sickness," then depriving her of a therapist in order to promote the suicidal outcome for the girl instead of the mother.

Some Group Process Therapy "cures" are only episcrpt transfers from one patient to another group member. The script-carrier's little Professor identifies a potentially apt episcrpt recipient (usually someone in the "I'm not-OK, You're OK" position). The latter then undertakes a role appropriate to the hamartic ending, which temporarily liberates the script-carrier from his curse.

Similarly the secret contract in some marriages is for one partner (usually the one with a flexible non-destructive script) to accept the episcrpt of the other, thereby relieving the destructive script-carrier — at least temporarily — from his tragic destiny.

Clinical example: A male patient's script injunction from his mother was "Give up and die." From his father he had the injunction "Kill!" Both parents overtly preached righteousness and justice. The patient reconciled

the injunctions into a script which called for committing a violent act, then being caught, giving himself up, and then being "justly" killed. Through this counterscript he became a righteous minister, like his father, but his preaching of hell-fire-and-damnation was not effective enough to implement the episcript, as none of his parishioners obliged by giving up and dying in a martyred way, or by demonstrably going to hell. Thereupon he became depressed, with occasional brief violent temper outbursts. He chose a wife who was depressed, suggestible, and pseudo-suicidal. This led to his becoming energetic and increasingly successful in business. She had temporarily accepted his episcript, being vulnerable to it because of her own background.

For a while, the secret episcript contract "worked." He became more and more successful. His increased absences became the rationale for her saying frequently that he was "killing her" by being away. She began to "give up." On the brink, her Child rejected the episcript and she went into treatment instead. Her own proclivities were related to depression, but not to violence and death. By going into treatment she placed his "Hot Potato" back into his hands. He fought off and sabotaged treatment for her and for himself as long as he could. However, as she increasingly shook off his episcript, he began to feel again the pangs of his script injunctions, and he too went into treatment.

A chronological child is frequently the helpless recipient of a parent's episcript. He is the "identified patient" who, as family therapists know, is usually not the most pathological member of the family. This is why often when the child who is the episcript carrier is removed from the home, another child is maneuvered into that role.

Why certain witch-messages are so powerfully implanted in children is now clear. If a chronological parent has a terrifying hamartic script, and his "Professor" is desperately casting around for an episcript recipient, an actual child, being the most vulnerable and suggestible, is often the "best" candidate. The Professor in the Child of the parent makes sure, over and over, that the episcript is really being taken over. This leads to a powerful implanting of the "electrode," sometimes by a parent whose Child does not otherwise appear to be crazy.

In the example of the patient whose script was heading him for the "madhouse," it was possible to trace back the injunction two generations. The force of the "madhouse" message lay in the desperation of the mother's Child, who felt that unless she passed this on to her son she would enter the madhouse. Her mother (the patient's grandmother) had used the same method, and her father's mother (the patient's great grandmother) had done it too. Nobody actually entered the madhouse, but the "Hot Potato" was passed on and on.

In the recent movie, "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" the script, counterscript and episcript can readily be identified. Miss Brodie is an attractive schoolteacher who "sacrifices" the "prime" of her life to educate

girls to finer-than-average cultural standards. This is the overt, conscious life-pattern that Miss Brodie acknowledges. As the movie progresses we can identify the script injunction, which is "Die a violent death for a heroic cause." The counterscript which is being enacted, is "Live nobly and sacrificially for great principles." Since the counterscript does not satisfy the death direction of her script, even though she kills off her sexuality and potential marriage, she must implement the episcript. She manages to influence her most suggestible student into getting killed for a cause, thereby temporarily averting the compulsion to make the supreme sacrifice herself.

SUMMARY

The episcript is a condensed version of a person's script, including the tragic ending, which the individual tries to "pass on" to someone else, as he would pass on a potato too hot to handle. The recipient is someone the individual can influence through Child-Child transmission such as his offspring, spouse, patient, student, or co-member of a leaderless group.

The promulgator of the episcript is the "Professor," (the Adult in the Child) of the script-carrier. He tries to offset the destructive consequences of the script by magical means, believing that if the curse can be transferred, he need not suffer its evil.

While the episcript is visibly taken over by another person, the individual has an access of energy due to temporary "freedom" from his script. But if the recipient fails to enact the script ending, or appears to be rejecting it, the individual is bound by his script again.

The episcript is different from the counterscript in that it is generated internally, following the lines of the script, by the crafty Adult ("Professor") in the Child. The counterscript is established in the Parent by messages received from the actual parents.

There is a desperate quality to the episcript due to the expectation: "I will suffer unless you are sacrificed for me." Thus when the Goddess withheld a favorable wind, Agamemnon was willing to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. So too, the patriarch Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. The episcript slogan reads: "I bewitch you to de-witch me."

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