

AN ANALYSIS OF JOAN RIVERS

If the reader has read the previous two papers, then you realize something which you were oblivious to previously. Namely, psychological influences can have profound ramifications on one's professional life. These influences can even *imbue* you with the requisite qualities to succeed in your field. This concept will constitute the essence of this analysis of Joan Rivers. She also experienced certain psychological influences which imbued her with a requisite quality which enabled her to succeed as a comedian. However, in contrast to Sylvester Stallone, these influences were not established in her childhood, but rather as an adult.

This analysis is predominantly predicated upon her book *Enter Talking*. The book pertained to the years she spent struggling to establish herself as a successful comedian. Although it was (physically) written by someone else, she obviously proceeded with substantial input into it. Before proceeding any further, there should be a strict word of caution about this book. The various details in the book should be taken with a grain of salt. The precise reason for this is as follows.

In the early '80's, I recall seeing Joan Rivers conduct an interview with Barbara Walters. In the course of this interview, she was describing her living conditions just prior to becoming a star on *The Tonight Show*. She stated that she was living in the village (Greenwich Village in New York City) and that she was starving. However, if one reads *Enter Talking*, we find a version of the events which are drastically different. Firstly, she was living at home with her parents (which, unto itself, precludes the possibility of her starving). Secondly, she was working as a writer on the television show *Candid Camera*. In all probability, the latter account is the true account of her conditions at the time she became a star. However, on the basis of the fact that she told Barbara Walter that she was living in the village and starving, what conclusion can we draw from this? It would be safe to state that when Joan Rivers relates her struggles to make it in the industry, to one extent or another, she has embellished the truth. Consequently, as far as I'm concerned, an analysis should not be implemented about Joan Rivers predicated upon *specific details* of *Enter Talking*. One should merely consider the "broad" element which manifests itself. Specifically, Joan Rivers experienced tremendous difficulties (and subsequently) bitterness in her quest for stardom.

Almost any comedian who has reached the pinnacle of success within the industry exhibits certain specific qualities within their act. One of those qualities pertains to the content of their act. In other words, *what* do they consistently joke about. An example would be the attempt to make life itself funny (Bill Cosby, Richard Pryor, David Brenner). Alternatively, there could be those like Bob Hope and Johnny Carson who simply tell random topical jokes. John Rivers style was to lash out at others, specifically celebrities. She would find some feature about them that was unusual and proceed with cruel jokes pertaining to them and that feature. Although this was not the only thing she joked about (she could be self deprecating at times) it did constitute the nucleus of her comedic style. The question is, did this style simply "spring out of thin air", or was it, like Stallone's development of Rocky, based upon something deeper?

On the basis of *Enter Talking*, we are already cognizant of the fact that she experienced extreme frustrations, despair, and bitterness in her quest to become a star (she even attempted suicide once during this period), even if some of those specific details are somewhat questionable. When one experiences these emotions over a period of years, what would be the ramifications? Potentially, there could be many reactions and emotional outcomes. How one

person reacts to this is contingent upon their own individual constitution and the influences they've experienced during the course of their lives. However, one possible reaction is as follows. There could be a deep rooted feeling of general anger and bitterness. Furthermore, this bitterness and anger could be felt towards specific people. Joan Rivers may have looked at others who were attaining success and view them with envy. What do they have that I don't? Why should they be so successful when I continue to struggle in poverty and futility? (According to *Enter Talking*, Joan Rivers and Barbra Streisand started out at the bottom together. Yet Streisand rose through the show business ladder of success well before Joan did.) Since Joan Rivers continued for years in a state of bitter struggle, her bitterness and anger no doubt became deeply rooted. What would have been the ramifications of this anger and bitterness?

Prior to proceeding with the analysis of Joan Rivers, let's scrutinize one example in order to illustrate how bitterness can affect a person. A brief examination of one aspect of John Lennon's life will delineate how anger and bitterness can affect an individual. When Paul McCartney's mother died, John wondered how Paul could be so passive. He stated that if his own mother died he would "lose his mind". In one biography of the Beatles, we find the following description subsequent to the death of John's mother.

"True to his word, John did go off his head. He seemed to blame everyone for his mother's death and was intent on revenge. There were no limits to his anger and grief. When he went to art college six weeks later, he was meaner than ever." We also have the following (which will assume some degree of importance in the analysis of Joan Rivers). "He began to see tragedy, deformity, and ugliness everywhere. He derived special pleasure from ridiculing street beggars and cripples. His typical behaviour would be to walk up to a hapless paraplegic he encountered on the street and make cruel jokes about his useless limbs. 'Where's ya legs go, mate? Run away with your wife?' His favourite targets were old people, and he seemed determined to give some senior citizen a heart attack by fright. He was rageful enough to beat up anyone who dared to challenge his aggression, and except for his band, everyone began to shy away from him."¹

Although this is only one example, *logic* dictates that if an individual is bitter, there may be the tendency to lash out (in one respect or another) at others. In relation to Joan Rivers, she was too much of a lady to engage in such socially unacceptable behaviour. She would not resort to physical violence or the wrongful ridiculing of the innocent. Although she would have consciously suppressed *any* desire to behave in a manner which was even remotely similar to John Lennon's behaviour, her bitterness nevertheless manifested itself. Although the bitterness and anger she experienced was conscious, it also exerted an effect upon her on an *unconscious* level. Instead of lashing out in socially unacceptable ways, she lashed out at others (the way John Lennon did), but in a socially acceptable way. She was capable of taking her bitterness and transforming it into a professional act. Her cruel jokes at the expense of others became her means of making others laugh. Her bitterness "imbued" her with a propensity for making jokes of this nature and enabled her to develop a successful act via a particular style of comedy. It should not have to be stated that these were all manifestations of the *unconscious* mind, *not* conscious decisions.

Some readers may feel that there is a fatal flaw with this theory. Once she became famous and affluent, her bitterness would have disappeared. This means that her particular comedic style would have vanished. Although her bitterness (presumably) ended upon her attainment of stardom, this doesn't necessarily mean that her comedic style would have vanished.

Her bitterness *initially* imbued with the ability to lash out at others in a humorous manner. Once she found that she could attain success with this style, she adopted it and made it an integral part of her act. Consequently, once she found the key to her comedic success, she never relinquished it regardless of whether or not her feelings of bitterness, resentment, and anger continued. This would have been comparable to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Larry Bird continuing with their respective styles even when the psychological factor which *initially imbued* them with their styles no longer prevailed.

REFERENCES

1. Peter Brown and Steven Gaines *The Love You Make An Insider's Story of The Beatles* p.29-30