

## CASE ANALYSIS

Alan Roland, Ph.D., Staff Member  
National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis

It goes without saying that analysts from whatever school of thought are as influenced by their sensitivity, perception, and personality in their analysis of a case as by their theoretical orientation. Thus, the following case analysis must be taken as that of one Freudian, since others of this viewpoint might come up with substantially different summaries. Furthermore, the ensuing evaluation must be taken as highly tentative since the data on which it is based, an initial interview, is very limited in scope. With these qualifications made, I would like to present my case analysis.

What is most striking to me about this woman is what must be a tremendous split in the ego: a woman highly capable in work and general social relationships on the one hand, and depressive and occasionally suicidal on the other in her unsatisfactory love relationships. The split probably goes back to the earliest periods of her life, and is based not only on the usual "good" and "bad" mother, but much more so on two very different maternal figures, the mother and grandmother. The mother must have been experienced not only as impatient and short-tempered, but as deserting the girl in her early life by having two other children right after her and then a third. This early desertion or rejection, reinforced in childhood by the father being away so much and preferring the younger sister, must have assumed devastating proportions in early adolescence when the parents were divorced, the children (except for the brother, the youngest) placed in a children's home, and as a final blow, the mother refusing to take her and her sisters back. To make the picture complete, in adolescence there is the cold and aloof stepmother. The intensity of rage, depression and separation anxiety of this maternal rejection and desertion must be enormous in this girl, and the image of a rejecting and deserting mother deeply ingrained in her unconscious. It is highly likely that any separations in the present would evoke these intense responses, and could lead to the kind of suicidal attempts she has made to punish the deserting object.

Her more positive and adaptive functioning is probably based in large part on the internalization of good relationships and identifications with her grandparents, particularly the grandmother. These early relationships might have served as an important bridge for her to seek acceptance and self-esteem first at school and then in work. On the other hand, she may also use her adaptive functioning to unconsciously defend against underlying depressive feelings.

This woman would seem to be an excellent candidate for intensive psychoanalytic therapy on a several times a week basis. It would be important, though, for her to have a therapist very much there (in contrast to an aloof one), and in the early stages of therapy to have much therapist-patient contact, in contrast to a more classical psychoanalytic situation where the separation would be experienced as too painful. It would thus be necessary to have the therapist experienced as a warm, non-deserting, and non-rejecting

real person, so that in later stages of analysis, after considerable character analysis was done, intense transference responses of the hurt and rage could be experienced within the context of an ongoing therapeutic alliance. Furthermore, this is one case more than most where it would be extremely important for the therapist to keep in mind the total life relationships of this woman in evaluating and analyzing the transference picture. The odds are that there will be much splitting of the transference, because of the split ego, in her relationships with different people. Thus, at certain times, the therapist may be the "fairy grandmother," while someone else, possibly the husband now, may be the rejecting "witch mother" (and father); while at other times the whole picture may reverse itself. Eventually, it may be quite important to analyze any idealizations of the therapist so that the rage may manifest more directly in the analytic relationship rather than to other figures. This would enable analysis of such reactions and projections of familial images to be more easily connected with the past, where they belong. Certainly, reactions to vacations or missed sessions (on either therapist's or patient's part) would be crucial to go into because of this woman's tremendous separation anxiety. As part of the analysis of such a split ego, it would be important to ascertain what kinds of conscious and unconscious identifications as a woman she made with both the mother and grandmother, to what extent there are counter-identifications (possibly as a giving schoolteacher and a non-deserting wife) to a rejecting and deserting mother, and what her ego ideal is based on with these two women.

Too little data is given to effectively evaluate this woman's defensive structure to ascertain what resistances may arise in therapy. One initial one may be preoccupation with what to do in day-to-day relationships with her husband, particularly in her possibly seeking some advice from the therapist rather than to analyze the nature of her involvement. A far deeper resistance might well manifest in her trying to be constantly mature and effective, her adaptive activity defending against deeper feelings and experiences of hurt, rage, and helplessness. If this were the case, it would be important for her to re-experience and understand these feelings, and how her present relationship with her husband ties in with them. However, should this resistance arise, its analysis must be done with great tact, because not only is much of her effectiveness highly adaptive, but is probably also based on early, good relationships with the grandparents--these two aspects being important to clarify for her before going into the defensive nature of her activity so as not to demean it.

In the analysis, itself, several areas need much investigation. It would be valuable to ascertain how her sexual identity has been affected by the parental situation of parents who didn't get along, an absentee and drunken father, having polio near the onset of puberty, and being dispensed with her sisters in an institution in early adolescence while her brother was kept by the mother. Another important area of probing would be her feelings towards men, not only in terms of her early experience with her father and grandfather, but the adolescent one as well of her father marrying another

woman and having children by her (often experienced by adolescent girls as a severe rejection). A third area of investigation concerns her feelings as a Roman Catholic, both about the parents' divorce and its effect on her self-image and conscience, and also about the possibility of her ending up with one, herself. In investigating all of these areas, the Freudian analyst would keep in mind the interaction of the actual experiences with the different phases the child was going through in terms of ego and psychosexual development, and the effects of these interactions on various aspects of the psychic structure. Thus, the parents' divorce and desertion of the children may have had a significantly different effect on this woman if it had come several years earlier or later, rather than in her early adolescence.

Much of the analytic investigation could be done in the early stages of the analysis on the patient's relationship with and feelings about her husband. In this connection, it would be important to see how much the choice of her husband was unconsciously governed by unresolved feelings and a strong attachment to the alcoholic father, where there might have been little object removal in her choice of a love object; or how much the relationship with the husband unconsciously serves as a screen for experiences with the rejecting and ungiving mother. It would furthermore be necessary to see to what extent this woman really wants to leave her husband, but cannot because of the tremendous separation anxiety it would engender, as well as separation possibly threatening counter-identifications with the deserting mother and whatever aspects of Catholic morality she may have incorporated into her conscience. Finally, it would be crucial to ascertain if she provokes the husband in any way to be alcoholic and an unsuitable, ungiving mate. In any event, it is clear that the husband is probably the major transference figure in her current life situation, and that it is absolutely necessary for her to perceive how her relationship with him connects to past relationships in terms of internalized familial images and intense reactions of anger, depression, and anxiety. Until this transference relationship with the husband is analyzed, it is likely that any decision she now makes may not be a rational one.

Diagnostically, this woman seems to have a severe character neurosis with strong depressive features; but one might add that the diagnosis, particularly with someone of her background, sheds relatively little light on the case.

#### SUMMARY

The reader has noticed that both an Adlerian (Shoobs) and a psychodramatist (Sacks) have used role playing. Obviously it can be used by therapists of any school of psychology, each working from his own frame of reference—and without the Moreno philosophy. Furthermore, it is an invaluable technique in the individual interview. But all role playing should be followed with a normal individual interview. Why? In order to sharpen self-awareness, to pinpoint our feelings and conclusions, and to modify any abnormal tension.

It is heartening to observe that the three therapists have tended to agree on diagnosis, choice of important symptoms and the like—in spite of their different approaches and methods of therapy.