Dealing with Character, Sex, and Race in Psychotherapy

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This paper looks at the complexity of issues that required analyzing when a Black female patient entered treatment with a White male psychoanalyst. Before the father or mother transferences could be dealt with and traced to their sources in childhood traumas, the cultural transference had to be resolved. In particular, the therapist had to confront the patient's ambivalent feelings about him as White and male, as well as understand and resolve his own cultural countertransference.

At a certain point during her first session I noticed a muted, almost deadened quality in her movements. "What are you feeling?" I asked.

"What feelings? I have no feelings," she quickly replied.

"Of course you have feelings."

"If I do, I don't know about them."

"You never feel happy or sad?"

"No."

"You never feel angry?"

"No."

“Scared?”

“No. I’m telling you, I don’t have any feelings.”

“How long have you not had any feelings?”

“As long as I can remember.”

Audrey sat before me with a wry, confident smile. To me, and to the world in general, she certainly appeared to have feelings. At that moment her wry smile and her direct gaze seemed to indicate a degree of anger and bitterness. However, the rest of her—the matter-of-fact voice, the blank eyes, the limp body and arms, the legs that were dangling from the chair, the conservative black dress that was draped over her like a blanket—all suggested resignation. I sensed a well of feelings locked inside her, but she had dissociated from them. Hence, even though physically she was an attractive woman, because of this dissociation and its allied contraction of energy, my first impression was of a plain and repressed personality.

I gazed at her, sorting out what she had told me so far. She was in her late thirties and came from an educated African-American family. She had called me after she had tried working briefly with several other therapists, including a Black therapist and a woman therapist, none of whom she felt had been able to understand her. She did not know if any therapist could, especially

a White male—but she was determined to give it one more try.

“If you don’t know what you feel, then how can you know who you are?” I asked.

“I don’t,” she replied, again in her matter-of-fact manner, as though discussing the weather. “I don’t know who I am on a personal level. I only know who I am symbolically.”

“And who are you symbolically?”

“I’m a Black woman. I’m a Black woman who has spent her life fighting racism. I’m a symbol, you see. A symbol of the Black struggle. I don’t have a personality separate from that symbolism.”

“But as a symbol you have feelings?”

She flashed the wry smile again. “Only anger at racism. That’s it. That’s all I’m allowed to be angry at.”

“Allowed? By whom?”

“My father.”

“You’re only allowed to be angry if your father permits it?”

“That’s right.”

“And he allows you to be angry about racism?”

“You got it.”

“Are you aware of any anger at me, being that I’m a White therapist?”

“In that I have a generalized anger at Whites, not to mention men, I could work up some anger at you on that symbolic level. On that symbolic level, I also have anger at Blacks for their Black racism toward Whites. But not on a personal level. On a personal level I have no feelings. I pretend to have feelings. In my daily life I smile at people and show gobs of sympathy and love and understanding. I play the role of the virtuous, caring woman. My brother calls me Saint Audrey. He says I have a saint complex, whatever that means. I play the role magnificently and people tell me their problems and look up to me. But inside I know I’m faking. I have no real feelings. It’s all an act. Inside there’s nothing but a void.”

From the Literature

Audrey’s case, perhaps more than any other that I have dealt with, confronted me with the overlapping tasks of resolving resistances stemming from issues of character, sex, and race. Such cases have become more

frequent in recent years and they require their own method of working through, a method that necessitates the distinguishing of character from sex and sex from race, as well as differentiating the transference relationship from the real relationship.

Upon first meeting her, Audrey seemed to fit the description of what Deutsch termed the as if personality type. In the early part of the twentieth century in Vienna, she met with a number of such personalities, young women who had dissociated or depersonalized to a point where they had no sense of any kind of identity, who went through life hiding behind a façade. “The individual’s whole relationship to life has something about it which is lacking in genuineness and yet outwardly runs along ‘as if’ it were complete” (Deutsch, 1942, p. 263). Perhaps such young women were more prevalent during the Victorian era, when societal sexual repression was so all-encompassing. Deutsch saw these personalities as schizoid types, on the border of schizophrenia. Today they would probably be called borderlines.

However, the research on borderlines has advanced considerably since Deutsch’s day. The “as if” personality might be seen as one variation of borderlines in which splitting and loss of a cohesive self is a most prominent feature. Now it is generally recognized that borderlines represent a mixed bag of characterological trends, encompassing sadomasochism, bipolar features, paranoia, narcissism, hysteria, and impulsivity, among other things. There are

some features common to most borderlines: They tend toward splitting, they tend toward primitive idealization and devaluation, often in rapid succession, and they suffer from, as Kernberg puts it, an excess of aggression. Building on Klein's (1932) work on projective identification, on Jung's (1927) and Winnicott's (1953) concepts of the real and false selves, on Jacobson's (1964) work on borderline depression, and on Balint's (1968) depiction of "basic fault" personalities, Kernberg explains that excessive aggression is warded off through splitting and the associated defenses of primitive idealization, omnipotence, devaluation, denial, and projective identification. By splitting themselves from their negative self and object representations, borderlines are able to protect their positive (false) self and object representations, but as a result they do not establish a strong ego nor a cohesive self. Neutralization of aggression never takes place, as the integration of positive and negative self and object representations cannot occur when splitting predominates.

Audrey's character type matches Kernberg's (Kernberg, Selzer, Koenigsberg, Carr, and Appelbaum, 1989) precise description of the borderline personality organization based on three structural criteria: identity diffusion, primitive defensive operations, and deficient ego and superego functioning. Kernberg writes of the subjective experience of chronic emptiness, contradictory self-perceptions and perceptions of others, which lead to a lack of personality integration. Audrey often reported a chronic emptiness (representing a dissociation from her feelings and the inability to make a

genuine emotional connection with other people), and she demonstrated a lack of personality integration and contradictory perceptions of self and others. She appeared to be a borderline with both typical borderline features and an “as if” quality. She was, in a sense, an amalgamation of a Kernbergian borderline and a Deutschian “as if” personality.

Kernberg considered Deutsch’s “as if” personality to be a preliminary description of the borderline (1975, p. 7). I would say, rather, that it is instead a variety of borderline. Although I found the identity defusion of which Kernberg speaks, as well as certain primitive defensive operations such as splitting and projective identification, in the transference, I also found a rather predominant emphasis on the sense of not being a real person or, as she put it, “not having any feelings,” which contrasts with the Kernbergian model, as does her obsessive-compulsive substructure which differs from the usual impulsive one. However, it later turned out that she did have feelings but was not in touch with them. She seemed to have a manic-depressive core to her personality—an excess of aggression that got channeled into a bipolar mood cycle. That is, the aggression was externalized during manic episodes, or it was taken out on herself during depressions. She related a pattern of working obsessively at some job or another, climbing the ladder, and then suddenly one day not being able to get out of bed to go to her job. She would invariably get fired, then lie in her bed for days and feel nothing until she managed to flip back into the manic mode. Her claim to have no feelings had its source in her superego (her

father's voice) which demanded that she be a saint and thereby censored almost all her real feelings. Hence, she was completely unaware of her aggression, her mania, or its meaning. She projectively identified other personalities as being aggressive to towards her, while she, "Saint Audrey," had to endure it.

Audrey's personality development had been arrested somewhere back in her early childhood, and as an adult she did not know who she was. She had a finely honed façade, but her façade was unreal, not centered in her feelings, and hence it was fragile. She did not possess a mature ego or a cohesive self. She suffered from identity diffusion and low self-esteem stemming from the sense of a void inside her (where her feelings should have been). Her ego could not adequately perform ordinary tasks such as reality testing, affect toleration, or delayed gratification. For example, she could not tell whether I really cared about her or whether I was just out to exploit and dominate her (like her father). Her splitting precluded her being able to achieve real intimacy with any individual, and bound her destructively to her father. If people believed her false self and had negative feelings toward her, she resented them.

She had spent her adult years in a virtual exile from herself and from others. She had had only the briefest kinds of relationships with men in which she would give herself to them and then not see them again. She related to them as a saint, as Saint Audrey, listening to them, controlling them, keeping

them at a distance, thereby maintaining, in her words, “a sense of superiority.” Relationships with women were nonexistent—competitive urges toward them sabotaged all attempts by women to relate to her. Intellectually gifted, she would excel at jobs for a year or two then be unable to continue, unable to carry on the charade (her “as if” self) or suppress the accumulation of negative feelings any longer. The one secondary gratification that sustained her was her narcissistic belief in her own innate superiority—an intellectual and moral superiority—and she clung to this belief as a child clings to a security blanket. This secret delusion compensated for her exile: she was alone, she told herself, because she was too good for the world, too good for Blacks, too good for Whites, and hence no one could understand her, including her string of therapists.

However, understanding and resolving Audrey’s characterological resistances was only one aspect of a complicated case. She also presented what I have referred to elsewhere (Schoenewolf, 1993) as cultural resistances and what Grey (1993) terms the enactment of social imperatives. Such resistances, in contrast to characterological resistances that are related to the transference, have their main source in cultural influences. She had resistances related to my being a “Caucasoid” (as she once jokingly called me) and a male. While these resistances had connections to childhood developmental factors, they seemed also to be attached to two current cultural movements— embodying radical African-American and feminist beliefs—which

had been incorporated by her superego. I was a White, and Whites, according to current radical Black ideology, cannot possibly understand Blacks. I was a male, and males, according to current radical feminist ideology, cannot possibly understand females. The former resistance stemmed in part from her identification with her father—a Black radical minister—as well as from a Black cultural milieu in which Whites are viewed as oppressors and exploiters. This is not to say prejudice and discrimination doesn't exist, but rather that this particular patient saw discrimination everywhere, even when somebody was trying to help her. The latter resistance apparently had its origin primarily in the radical feminist culture that currently permeates all aspects of our society, which views males as oppressors, exploiters, and sexual abusers. In addition, since her ego ideal (formed mostly through her relationship with her father) identified herself as a martyr and a victim, she was all the more susceptible to the radical feminist notion of woman-as-victim and the radical Black notion of Black-as-victim, along with the narcissistic grandiosity of moral superiority inherent in these stances.

These resistances posed considerable obstacles—on top of those presented by her characterological resistances. In addition, from her contradictory statements about race and gender I gathered that her identity diffusion prevented her from identifying herself as a Black or a White or even as a woman. She did not feel comfortable with either Blacks or Whites, nor at home with either her masculine or feminine side. This added additional

confusion to her resistances, which required a gradual and painstaking sorting out and working through.

My work with her consisted not just of treating an “as if” or borderline personality, but also in conducting cross-cultural therapy. This entailed having to find a way to strengthen Audrey’s reality-testing function to the extent that she could distinguish between the discrimination against Blacks and women that does exist, and the discrimination she imagined when she was in a depressive state, and which she then projected onto and identified as belonging to me. It also entailed sorting out my own countertransference to determine if I indeed harbored discriminatory feelings or whether they had been projected onto me.

The Reconstruction

Audrey was a middle child, caught between two half-brothers. The older brother was the offspring of her father and his first wife, who died during labor. The younger brother was the child of her father’s third wife, her stepmother. Her father was African American with dark skin. Her biological mother was Native American with lighter skin. Audrey resembled her mother in both shape and skin color, while her brothers had the darker skin of their father. She grew up in the South.

She did not see much of her father during her first three years. He

developed an illness and was in and out of the hospital, and for a time it appeared he might die. During that period she recalled being close to her mother. Her earliest memory was about an incident of urinary incontinence. She wet her pants while at nursery school at the age of 4, and felt horrified by it. But her mother was “very kind” and told her “Those things happen.” I tentatively interpreted the centrality of this memory as indicative of a trauma that may have led to the development of an obsessive-compulsive trend in her personality; she had to be perfect, neat, lest she “shamed” herself. The memory of her mother’s kindness may be a screen memory masking her own guilt—perhaps oedipal guilt about having later succeeded in getting rid of her mother and having her father all to herself.

Sometime around the same year her father came home from the hospital and began a long convalescence. At first he seemed like a stranger and Audrey was afraid of him. One night she heard her mother and father quarreling. She wobbled sleepily into their bedroom to find her mother aiming a pistol at her father—the pistol her father kept in a drawer beside the bed. As Audrey stood in the doorway, the gun went off, wounding her father in the shoulder. While the father was in the hospital being treated for this wound, her mother explained why she had shot her father. They were having an argument about which school to send Audrey to the following year. Her father, who was a minister active in civil bodytext causes, wanted to send her to an all-White school in order to force the school to integrate. Her mother was absolutely

against it, saying she did not want her daughter to be used this way. Their feelings about this issue were quite strong, and her father was stubborn about his right, as the father, to decide the matter.

Her mother was convicted of assault but did not serve any time in prison. As a compromise solution, she agreed to a divorce and to giving up custody of her child. She also agreed not to see Audrey again. Hence, at the age of 5 Audrey was separated from her mother and did not see her again until she was 21 years of age. She recalled going to the train station with her mother on the day the mother packed her things and left. As her mother was about to board the train, she ran up to her, leaving her father and brother standing behind, and clung to her, crying.

“Please don’t leave me,” she begged. “Please, please, please don’t leave me, Mommy! Please! Let me go with you! Why can’t I go with you?” She did not want to stay with her father, who was still a stranger to her.

“You have to stay. The court said so. I can’t do anything about it. But I’ll always be thinking of you, and I’ll always love you.”

As she returned to the house with her father and older brother, she felt terrified, knowing that her father had seen her beg her mother to take her away. From then on she believed she had to be extra careful to please her father, lest he exact revenge on her for being “a traitor.” This may have reinforced her

obsessive-compulsive features.

Even before her mother had gone away, during the time things were being decided in court, it had been her task to care for him during his convalescence. This care included bathing him. Until she had shot him, his wife had done this bathing, but afterwards he did not want her to touch him and enlisted Audrey to take over this chore. She recalled seeing her father's penis and wanting to touch it (he washed that part of himself), and had many erotic, oedipal fantasies about being her father's wife and having his children. Later, in treatment, she brought in a dream that alluded to this period.

In the dream, she was masturbating a horse or some kind of four-legged animal. It had a dog's penis, but the animal was bigger than a dog. When I asked for her associations to this dream, she recalled bathing her father and seeing his penis. I interpreted her confusion about what kind of animal she was masturbating to the confused feelings she must have had about bathing her father—a mixture of resentment about being taken away from her mother, erotic excitement at winning her father and being privy to such intimacy with him, guilt about crossing the incest taboo, and perhaps a fear and envy of this appendage, which she and her mother did not possess, and which left them both helpless under its power. In addition, the horse and dog perhaps symbolized her feeling that her father was an "animal" whose aggression she feared.

Soon afterward, her father remarried. His third wife was light-skinned like her mother but much younger. From the time the stepmother appeared, any semblance of intimacy with her father ceased completely. Indeed, her stepmother quickly intervened and would often not allow Audrey to even talk with her father, asserting that, “He’s busy, don’t bother him.” Her relationship with her stepmother was quite strained. The stepmother was competitive and jealous of her, and enjoyed flaunting her sexual relationship with her father by kissing him and sitting on his lap in front of the children, acting like a child herself.

It was at this time that her father began sending her to all-White schools. Each fall they would move to a new town and he would make pronouncements in each district about the evils of segregation, and he would defiantly bring his older son and daughter to each new school, usually accompanied by Federal marshals. Audrey remembered the isolation of being the only Black student in each school, but also the sense of moral superiority of having all of these White students hate her and feeling pity for them. She recalled moving from town to town, never being able to make any friends, Black or White, never being able to make any lasting attachments other than those to his own immediate family.

“That must have been when I developed my Saint Audrey persona,” she remarked, upon recalling this period. “My father would always preach that my brother and I should only have love and pity for the White students. We weren’t

supposed to have any hatred for anybody. We were supposed to be above it all. However, we could see that this was a case of “Do as I say, not as I do,” for it was quite evident that he had tons of anger toward Whites. So while on a verbal level we were told not to have anger at Whites, his own behavior told us that in actuality it was allowable.”

What was definitely not allowed was to have any anger—nor any complaint whatsoever—about her father or her stepmother. Her father had a temper the intensity and unpredictability of which was terrifying. His way of whipping her, for example, was to have her lie on her bed, place a pillow over her head, and sit on her so she could not move or scream. “You are very very bad,” he would assert, and give her one hundred whacks. If he heard a scream, he would yell, “Swallow it!” This way of punishment, with its combination of physical abuse and negative indoctrination, termed by Miller (1983) as “poisonous pedagogy,” insures, according to her research, that a child will become severely repressed and will be prone to defenses such as splitting and dissociation, since the child has been told she is very bad if she even thinks anything bad about her father.

The refusal of the father to listen to anything other than positive statements toward him caused her to feel more and more alienated and disturbed. As she became more disturbed, she developed a reputation as the family oddball. Her brothers teased her about being oversensitive. Her

stepmother saw her as a threat and condescended to her. She was the only girl, the daughter of a woman who her father never talked about, the child with lighter skin. She perceived a double standard in the way her brothers were treated and the way she was treated by her father and by her paternal grandmother, who would visit frequently. Grandmother doted on the father and Audrey's brothers but was contemptuous toward her. There was apparently a generational pattern in the family of showing extreme favoritism toward sons and contempt toward daughters. But she could say nothing about any of this, nor did she trust her perceptions about it. Indeed, she appeared to introject the family's perspective, demeaning herself and idealizing her family.

A dream she brought to therapy during the initial stages shows this introjection and idealization. She was on a boat with her family. Suddenly they disappeared. The boat moved along a river, and on the bank she saw statues of Greek gods, all toppled over. She realized her family was still there but asleep. She woke them and asked, "Did you see that?" "No," they answered. "We didn't see anything." She told them to look back, but they could not see the statues. The dream seems to indicate her idealization (her family as Greek gods), as well as her anger in the form of a wish for them to disappear (as they did in the beginning of the dream), or at least to be knocked down off their pedestals. The fact that she can see something that they can't see perhaps denotes her need to repress and hide her aggression—her wish to get rid of them—from her family, as well as representing her family's continual

misunderstanding of her. It may also show her alienation from them (she is the oddball in the dream, as in real life)—that is, her introjection of their attitude toward her. Finally, viewed from a gender or racial perspective, the toppled statues might also suggest her wish to topple White male oppression.

Her false self, erected upon the fragile foundation of the narcissistic delusion of superiority and control, was shattered one day when she was 35 years old. She had met a man whom she thought was different from the rest, whom she believed was on her level. He was a Black man with “education and class.” He was a businessman with an air of confidence and determination, and that attracted her to him. They saw each other for a few months and he seemed to understand her like nobody else had ever understood her. He understood her the way she wanted to be understood (which I silently interpreted as his mirroring her grandiosity). She opened up to him, even felt sexual pleasure, and entertained thoughts of marrying him. Then, on that pivotal day, she received a bank statement indicating that her $30,000 in savings, which she had been planning to use for law school, had been withdrawn. The man had disappeared and she was never able to find him. She had lost him, her money, and any semblance of well-being. She sank into a lengthy depression.

She reported that upon hearing of this incident, her father, stepmother and two brothers abandoned her. When she wrote them, they did not answer.

When she called them, they were brief and perfunctory. “They were embarrassed by my problem rather than sympathetic,” she recalled. “They saw me as an embarrassment to the family.” At about that time, she had a recurring dream in which she found her family dead—her father, stepmother, and two brothers. She did not know how they had died, but she buried them in a pit in the ground. Somehow she could see through the dirt, as if she had X-ray vision, and saw the rats eating their bodies. She was unable to make sense of this dream; for in her waking life she continued to view things from her family’s perspective (they were ideal) and did not harbor any anger at them; if they deserted her now, she decided, they probably had a good reason. I saw the dream as denoting not only her rage at her family, but also the rage that was taken out on her self (in the “pit” of her stomach), the result of this ultimate betrayal by the family she had still hoped would someday acknowledge her worth.

Upon being evicted from her apartment a year after this incident, her younger brother finally took pity on her and invited her to move in with him. For a year she slept on a couch in his living room, unable to go back to work. Normally compulsive, she did not bathe for months at a time, ate only to survive, and seldom left the apartment. After a year she finally took a job as a part-time receptionist. It was then she first went into psychotherapy. Her first therapist, a novice female, apparently mirrored her false self and Audrey soon left her in contempt. The second therapist, an African American, wanted to join

her anger at Whites but, according to her, could not tolerate her anger at Blacks or at her father. Her third therapist, a White male, did not believe in talking about the past, she reported, so he frustrated her need to analyze and reconstruct her childhood.

Characterological and Cultural Resistances

The concept of resistance has been used in psychoanalysis to describe a patient's unwillingness to do the work of psychoanalysis due to the negative, erotic, or even the positive transference. I refer to this kind of resistance as the characterological resistance. However, in treating Audrey and other patients in recent times I have come across another resistance, which I refer to as the cultural resistance. This is a resistance that is primarily not based on personality factors traceable to childhood traumas and the like, but instead on attitudinal trends in society. In Audrey's case, the cultural resistances proved stronger than the characterological resistances, although the two also sometimes overlapped.

In the beginning her “as if” personality showed itself in the transference. I was at times her father or older brother (whom she linked together) and at times her younger brother. At other times I might have been her mother, who would be tender and caring but who might abandon her. In either case I was an exalted figure. This meant that she idealized me and needed my approval and

my permission to exist.

However, much of the time I was the White male. Since her dad did not allow her to express any negative feelings, except for anger at Whites about racism, for a long time she did not express any negative feelings about me or about the therapy. Instead, when she was angry at something I had said or done, she would verbalize generalized anger at Whites or males. During those times when she went on tirades about racism, I had to be very careful to mirror her point of view. It was not that I thought she was entirely wrong. Racism does exist and had affected her development in many ways. However, her narcissistic need to make racism responsible for all her problems, and the allied refusal to take any responsibility for her own contribution to her bad relationships and to minimize the contribution of her dysfunctional family, complicated the transference. Hence, from the beginning her cultural resistance was most prominent. It originated from the cultural climate in society as well as from her family history. More than anything, I became a symbol of White oppression, or of White male oppression. Because of this, occasional impasses developed during which she became so furious at me, and so convinced that as a White male I could not understand her, that she would fall silent.

My way of breaking an impasse was to insist that she see me as a human being, not as a male or a member of the White race. As simple as this sounds,

it turned out not to be so simple at all. During the time of this treatment, issues of sexism and racism were prominent in America, and it was difficult for Blacks and Whites or men and women to see past each other's gender or skin color and relate to each other as humans. Ironically, the Human bodytext Movement's obsessive emphasis on issues of gender and race only served to increase the gender and racial polarity; and the result was that females more often than not went into treatment with female therapists, males with male therapists; and Blacks with Black therapists. And so the same politics persisted in the therapy. Yet I plowed on.

"The only we we're going to get past this impasse is to forget about politics and concentrate on what you're feeling and what I'm feeling," I told her. "It's important for you to distinguish between your assumptions about me as a symbolic White male, and the reality of how I'm actually acting toward you in the here-and-now. Am I trying to oppress you? Is my attitude negative or demeaning? Am I making any stereotypical assumptions about you?"

"There's nothing I can really pinpoint, except for your having me lie on the couch while you sit up. It's rather oppressive. It places me in a subservient position."

"Do you feel subservient when you lie on a dentist's chair?"

"That's different. He has to have me in that position in order to do his

work."

"So do I. This is the procedure that works best for me, because it's the one that brings the deepest introspection and change."

"That sounds right. But I'm still not sure I can trust you. You may just be pretending for the sake of the treatment. I don't know how you behave outside these walls when you see a Black person. For all I know, you may be two-faced, like all the Whites I've ever met."

We had to go over this again and again as I repeatedly called attention to how I was treating her during her sessions. Although she did not give up the notion that I was two-faced, she gradually understood that all conjectures about who I was outside the office were either characterological or cultural resistances.

As we continued to explore her transference thoughts about me, she began to realize that it was she, rather than I, who had been making stereotypical assumptions. She was assuming things about me based on my being White and male. As a White, I was arrogant, spoiled, and full of unconscious hate toward Blacks; as a male, I was superior, dogmatic, entitled, insensitive, and full of unconscious hate toward women. Fortunately, because of her upbringing by a white-skinned mother and Black father, she could see both sides, and the transference analysis was made somewhat easier.

Resolving the cultural resistance got us past the initial impasses. For a time she seemed to understand that I was not The White Male but a human being with his own unique thoughts and feelings. We ban to work on material related to her father, brothers, and mother and the many resistances associated with them. As we did this, her repression of her real feelings and memories began to pry loose. The displacement of her rage onto me and onto Whites and men gave way to a more complicated picture of a myriad of feelings and memories about her father, mother, brothers, and other people in her life. At the same time, the transference toward me because more characterological than cultural, rooted in an oral-stage merger with me as a surrogate mother.

For several months we went through a typical honeymoon period. She called me, “My Dr. Schoenewolf,” and would come in smiling and repeatedly affirming how lucky she was to find me. She also attributed her good feelings to a combination of the antidepressant that had been prescribed for her by an affiliated psychiatrist and the melatonin she was taking on her own to help her sleep. While the positive transference held sway, we were able to do some good work. For example, one day when I did not answer a phone call right away, she came in regretting that she had opened up to me so much. She then recalled a time during her childhood when she had opened up to a girlfriend, confiding that she hated her stepmother. The girlfriend told the stepmother and Audrey was severely punished. In this session she was able to tie together the

links between her fears of depending on me to the formerly repressed, now conscious memory and the conflicts that underpinned her present psychopathology.

However, the honeymoon was brief, and gradually she shifted back into a negative transference and its accompanying resistance, in a more insistent form. The negative transference again expressed the feeling that I, a White male, was oppressing her, although now she could not be as convinced about it as she could before.

She came in one day and announced that she was sitting up and that she would be sitting up from then on. She sat in one of my chairs. She scowled at me.

"You mean you're not going to lie down ever again?"

"That's correct."

"That sounds final."

"It is."

"Can't we discuss it?"

"I'm sure we will." (Wry smile.)

I interpreted this cultural resistance, as well as the negative father transference that underpinned it, and at the end of the session she seemed to understand. There were a few sessions of positive transference. But before long she would again be just as adamant that I was simply a White male who did not “get it.” Upon first refusing to lie down, she grudgingly acknowledged that she felt she was about to get in touch with some feelings, and she did not want to have any “messy sentimentalism” in front of me. It might make her more dependent on me than she already was and then I would take advantage of her. (I interpreted this to mean that I would use her in some way for my benefit, either sexually or professionally.) Later when I reminded her of this statement she claimed to have forgotten it; she just kept reiterating that she wanted to be on equal terms with me, not oppressed. In another session, when I persisted in asking for her thoughts about lying on the couch and she could come up with none, I asked her to finish the following sentence with the first thought that came into her head: “If I lie on the couch, then…?” Her reply: “You win.”

At times I found myself becoming annoyed with her, and I knew this was my countertransference. I had thoughts of wanting to say to her, “If I’m a White male, then go to a Black female therapist!” These thoughts were transient, and I also realized they had to do with my own childhood traumas rather than with a cultural counterresistance. I resented her because she was troublesome, not because she was Black or a woman. “You’re locked into a power struggle with

me," I interpreted. "It's the power struggle you would have liked to have had with your father, but couldn't because it was too threatening. In your childhood it would have been productive to resist your father, but now, as a patient, it's totally counterproductive."

By insisting that we focus on the real relationship between her and me, and contrasting it, though interpretations, with her relationship with her father, we were seemingly able to make some headway in resolving the resistance. But, like a virulent fever, the resistance still clung to her very being. We went through an extended cycle of positivity and negativity that lasted almost a year. During that year I could see progress in an inverse way; the cycles of negativity began to last longer and the negative transference took on an almost psychotic mode insofar as she was more and more stubborn about it. A point was then reached when she would no longer tolerate any interpretations. I was a White male who could not possibly understand her, and that was all there was to it. The final breaking of the fever came only when I joined her resistance one day.

She came in saying, for perhaps the hundredth time, that the therapy wasn't working, she wasn't making any progress, and I didn't understand her. She added that her friend Mary (whom she had repeatedly emphasized was a Black woman) totally understood her. "It's amazing how easy it is to talk with her," she said.

Now, at last, I gave vent to the thoughts that I had hitherto suppressed. “Perhaps you should make Mary your therapist. Or go to a Black female therapist.”

“You sound annoyed.”

“Why would I be annoyed?” I asked as calmly as I could.

“Because I keep implying that Mary can understand me better than you can.”

“Did you want to annoy me?”

“Maybe. But that doesn’t invalidate what I was saying. I mean, maybe you can’t understand me because you’re White and male. Maybe you’re not aware of your own sexism and racism. Maybe I would work better with a Black woman therapist.”

She gave me a pointed look.

“Maybe you would.”

Her expression suddenly changed. “Are you trying to get rid of me?”

“No, I’m trying to help you think things out.”

She sighed and looked a bit sad. “If you want my opinion, I’d like to stay with you and struggle through this. How can we break this impasse?” she muttered. I could see she was truly hurt. “As much as I hate to admit it, you may be right about the power struggle. Maybe I am pushing you away the way I’d like to push away my father.”

The following session she lay back down on the couch. “There, I’m complying, all right. But I don’t like it one bit.” I asked her to talk about not liking it and she launched into a diatribe about her father’s total domination of her.

Discussion

The major trauma in her life, in terms of Audrey’s character development, seems to have been her separation from her mother at the age of 5. In being separation from her mother, she was in a sense separated from her self. I speculate that it was here that her sadomasochistic and narcissistic characters (the martyrdom and the feelings of moral superiority) first began. First of all, she lost the model upon whom her female identity had rested. Her mother, who had once soothed Audrey’s feelings of shame, now had become an object of shame herself (a criminal). After her mother’s departure, Audrey became the lone female in a house of males; this exacerbated her masculinity complex (Adler 1929), gender identity confusion, and dissociation from self and others. Her mother’s departure also must have felt like an abandonment, one which

she could not mourn, since her father would not allow her mother's name to be mentioned in the house. Hence she could not work through or integrate her feelings and memories about her mother, her mother's conduct (shooting her father), or her mother's departure, which again added to her alienation from her self. Then, on top of this, she soon became a pawn of her father's civil bodytext game, which served to reinforce her impoverishment of self.

By using her as a tool of integration, her father failed to respond to her on a human level. She became his narcissistic extension, her job being to serve his own false, grandiose self. Her mission was to act out his frustration and anger at Whites. His frustration and anger was probably based both on reality and grandiosity. The reality was that there was plenty of discrimination and schools in the South were segregated and Black schools were inferior. The grandiosity had to do with his mother, who according to Audrey, had raised him to believe that he was appointed by God to save Blacks and that his judgments were divine. Hence his feelings of entitlement made him all the more impatient and susceptible to frustration and anger. His grandiosity was such that he saw all those around him—his children, his wife, anybody with whom he was involved—as puppets to be used at will. Since he and his purpose were divine, he could not be doubted or contradicted.

The period of bathing her father seems to have fixated her sexual development. Her inability to experience any sexual feelings in her relations

with men was perhaps associated in part to the repressed memories of her emotionally incestuous relationship with her father, and perhaps to her brothers. It was probably also related to the rage that lurked in her unconscious and could never be expressed to her father, and hence to any man; it therefore had to be defended against through splitting and its associated primitive idealization and devaluation of the men she became involved with as an adult. Finally, it was related to her mother's traumatic departure and its effect on her female identity confusion.

Often in families it is the mother who clings to a daughter, preventing her from making the oedipal turn to the father. For example, Chasseguet-Smirgel, in a study of the Oedipus complexes of several female patients, concluded that they all had one common feature: "the mother was sadistic and castrating, the father was good and vulnerable" (1964, p. 132). In this case, the opposite happened; the father prevented the daughter from bonding with the mother. On the other hand, her inability to relate to women was also probably linked to the stepmother's crushing rivalry. Perhaps it was the one-two punch of the father's tyranny and the stepmother's competiveness that was the final straw of her dissociation from her self, and resulted in her own peculiar personality makeup.

"You integrated the schools," I once told Audrey, "but you didn't integrate yourself."

The additional complication in this case, as in so many cases these days, is the cross-cultural factor. Today in America people are often viewed as ethnic symbols rather than as human beings. Audrey's identity, from very early on, was tied to her role as a symbol of racial integration. Later, as an adult, radical Black and feminist cultural movements reinforced her ego ideal of the morally superior Black woman who must suffer and die in the world of White racism and male sexism. To try to flourish in this world, she decided, was futile. Hence, she became a prisoner of "liberation," since the very movements that promised to liberate her ended up positively reinforcing her borderline paranoid sexual and racial attitudes to the effect that "all Whites are biased" and "all males are oppressors."

Treating borderlines has become an increasingly common matter in psychotherapy; treating people from various ethnic groups, who bring with them cultural resistances, has also become increasingly common. Indeed, one often encounters both at the same time, as in this case. Those with the weakest egos and the lowest self-esteem, who are full of repressed rage, are most prone to identify with a radical movement, which offers instant (though false) elevation of self esteem and an instant outlet for the expression of rage.

Increasingly today the tackling of cross-cultural issues takes up considerable time in therapy. As demonstrated in the case history, the way out of the impasses that result from such issues seems to involve focusing on the

interpersonal dynamics of the therapy relationship. Here is where psychoanalytic therapy works perhaps better than any other, for it presents the opportunity to point out to the patient the difference between what she is projecting onto the therapist and who the therapist really is. The pitfall of cross-cultural therapy is the development by the therapist of a cultural counterresistance. The White therapist, for example, in treating a Black patient, may have a need to prove to himself and the patient that he is not a racist and therefore develop a reaction-formation that blinds him to the patient's real psychodynamics. The Black patient (especially if he or she is borderline) may then lose respect for the therapist and defeat the therapy. A similar thing can happen when a male therapist treats a female patient, especially one who uses a feminist defense. The male may have a need to prove that he is not a sexist and therefore develops a reaction formation that blinds him to the patient's use of feminism to control and defeat the therapy.

Another problem occurs when a therapist and patient share a particular ethnicity, political view, or religious view. Here the two may form a collusion of cultural resistance and counterresistance that may keep them from analyzing deeper transferential issues. For instance, a Black therapist may treat a Black patient, both of them subscribing to radical Black ideology. The therapist may reinforce the patient's belief that all her problems stem from White racism and the treatment may then avoid transference issues entirely.

I have tried to write this in human language, as well as in the language of psychoanalysis, in order to present a visceral understanding of the case. In addition, as I am an eclectic psychoanalyst, I have referenced authors of differing theoretical positions, believing that all schools have contributed to the growth of psychoanalysis, and no school, past or present, should be dismissed out of hand. Finally, I recognize that the issues I have written about (and the fact that I am a White male writing about them) will engender controversy and criticism. I hope that there will be a few people, in this generation or next, who can hear me out.

Postscript

The subtitle of this paper might be, “A woman in search of her mother and her self.” During the course of the treatment, the patient eventually did contact her mother, but not until she had spent months working through her anger at her mother for abandoning her. At first she was still too angry for normal conversation. Once the anger had been addressed, mother and daughter began talking on the phone in a way probably similar to that of a normal mother and daughter interaction. They talked twice a week about what was going on in each other's lives. In time Audrey came to see how much her mother had always loved her and still loved her. And in time, she recaptured a part of her self that had been lost all those years in between, a part that identified with her mother's femininity and accepted her own. I saw this as an integral part of the

therapy. It still continues now, as I write these words.

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