

Existential Child Therapy

Initiation of an Obsessional Adolescent Boy

Eve Lewis

Initiation of an Obsessional Adolescent Boy

Eve Lewis

e-Book 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *Existential Child Therapy* edited by Clark Moustakas

All Rights Reserved

Created in the United States of America

Copyright © 1966 by Clark Moustakas

Author

Eve Lewis is a psychotherapist at the Exeter Child Guidance Centre in England and visiting lecturer at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland.

Initiation of an Obsessional Adolescent Boy

Eve Lewis

Roy was twelve years old when he first came to the Child Guidance Center. He was referred by a school medical officer, who reported that Roy was suffering from anxiety and depression which made it increasingly difficult for him to continue in school. Roy had been frequently absent in infant and junior school because of infectious diseases, heavy colds, and two hospitalizations. An attack of jaundice precipitated his present acute state of anxiety and his referral. With the onset of this illness, Roy had left school altogether.

There was no history of neurosis or psychosis in the family, but Mrs. J. called herself "highly strung." She had a recurrent nightmare of being imprisoned deep underground and a tendency to claustrophobia. When Roy was an infant, our region had been subjected to many enemy air attacks. Even when bombs were falling, Mrs. J. had at times been driven to go out of the air raid shelter because she could no longer bear the enclosed and crowded space. She was an extroverted woman who mixed reasonably well in social situations. She worked part-time in a large department store.

In contrast, Mr. J. was an introvert. Although kind to his wife and

children, he was somewhat detached both at home and at work. He held a superior position in a highly skilled trade. He was an isolated person in his job, having no close relationship with any of his fellow employees. Susan, nine years old, was the final member of the family. She had adjusted adequately to the requirements of life in the home and at school. She and Roy were on good terms, but by no means devoted. Her birth had not seemed to upset him in any way.

Roy was a good-looking boy, tall for his age, blue-eyed and very fair, with a sensitive guarded expression. As I came to know him in the course of our relationship, I found him to be introverted, self-reflective, and able to think clearly within the limits of his endowment. On a first examination with Wechsler's Intelligence Scale for Children, his I.Q. was 101. On a later examination, when he was less anxious, he obtained an I.Q. of 115.

After the first test, I suggested to Roy that he and I should talk over his problems; together we would search for a way to solve them. I added that, if he wished, he could paint or draw or model as we talked.

With this as a preliminary background, our meetings in therapy got under way. We continued together through thirty-one half-hour sessions, spread over twelve months. I will present the significant episodes occurring between us. The meetings were punctuated by silences, by passing comments

from Roy or myself as our experience and our relationship began to emerge and unfold. What appear to be long explanations on my part were broken by questions from Roy or by nods and grunts and other gestures to show that he understood. As we came to know each other, we began to share little jokes and to invent catch phrases for some of his difficulties.

The First Meeting: Phobias and Rituals

I began my hours with Roy by assuring him that I would not press him to return to school but, on the contrary, would respect his decision to return or not in accordance with his own readiness or wish. In my experience, removal of pressure in the place where greatest tension and disturbances are provoked ensures cooperation from the child and enables him to utilize his resources to face his problems rather than using them to battle against a therapist who attempts to force him prematurely into a situation of extreme threat and fear. Thus, I always leave the child free to make his own decision when a school phobia is a marked symptom in an emotional disturbance.

Roy received my preliminary remarks with relief. Immediately, he relaxed, settled back in his chair, looked less strained, and indicated a readiness to begin.

I told Roy that his mother had already given me a brief description of his problem in school and at home but that I preferred to hear directly from him,

as I believed his own views were important and I would respect them. The adolescent appreciates a recognition of him as an individual and trusts and values the adult who genuinely listens and accepts his version of his own experience as valid. A comment like, “Yes, I know, it’s simply awful, isn’t it?” when spoken in an accepting human way, at once strikes the right note and registers as an agreement when a child is painfully struggling to express his secrets and his fears. And the very fact that the therapist accepts the child’s statements calmly depotentializes the problem to a considerable extent.

With many hesitations and sideway glances, Roy began to explain that his great problem was not the horror in connection with school but was a feeling of having “to do things.” I encouraged him to tell me about the things he felt compelled to do. Bit by bit, his story stumbled out. He had to safeguard himself with a variety of rituals in dressing, undressing, washing, going to the lavatory, passing from one room to another or from the house onto the road. The rituals had to be carried out before he could begin to eat or to read, and in nearly every major activity of his life. He had to say his prayers again and again in a particular place and in a definite posture. I asked him if he knew why he had to perform all these rituals. He replied that he felt something awful would happen to him unless he did. I informed Roy that other boys and girls had mentioned similar rituals and fears to me and that the “something awful” for them was a fear of dying. I asked if this was so with him. Roy absolutely burst out, “Yes. It is! It is! I am often terrified of dying.” The sight of

an ambulance or a hearse made him feel faint. He could not bear even to hear about illness or death. Following these revealing comments, Roy picked up a pencil and began to sketch. My feeling was that he had chosen to draw at this moment not only as a way of escaping further consideration of the terror he had put into words, but also to suggest that he had blurted out the “real problem” and so had nothing further to say.

Of course, Roy’s fear of death was not the basic problem. I knew for a fact that for the past three months he had been sleeping in his mother’s bed, while his father, apparently uncomplainingly, had been sleeping in Roy’s single room. Since I believed this to be indicative of the central problem in Roy’s life, I felt it had to come out into the open. At the same time, I recognized that I might embarrass him and cause him to withdraw if my broaching of this area was not done in a gentle and sensitive way.

I spoke to him directly, but in a personal tone. “Then your fear of death explains why you are now sleeping with your mother; you feel safe when you are with her.” Roy blushed scarlet and muttered, “It’s only for a little time.” He assured me that soon he would return to his own bed. Deliberately changing the subject, I said, “Look here, Roy! You feel compelled to do these rituals all day long, yet you know it doesn’t make sense, don’t you?”

Roy went on drawing for some moments without comment. Then he

agreed that the rituals were senseless, but omitting them only increased his fear and pain. I told him I could understand that this could happen and that we needed together to find out how to put an end to all these senseless performances. We needed together to discover the unknown forces inside him that compelled him to “do things,” terrified him with thoughts of death, and prevented him from enjoying a happy life at home and at school. I suggested that, if he could just talk freely and openly to me, that that in itself would help. I also suggested that a discussion of dreams often revealed the nature of inner experiences. His paintings too might provide us with clues to his inner life.

He was especially interested in what we could learn from paintings, so at this point I showed him a drawing done some years earlier by a nine-year-old girl. It was of a tiny figure seated at a school desk in front of a blackboard. The board was covered with a sequence of numbers adding up to an enormous sum. On the desk were a pencil, a pen, and an exercise book. All were very much larger than the figure of the child. I asked Roy if he could tell me what clue this drawing might have given me. He gazed carefully at it and then said, “It looks as if school was too much for her.” I told him that he was quite right. The girl was accomplishing R. stream work, which was at the level of her potential, but she was expected by her parents and teachers to succeed at an A. stream level. The child did not understand why she felt ill every morning, why she felt unable to go to a school she hated. But she had drawn

the truth for me. Perhaps he might depict his own real inner life for me through paintings and drawings. Roy was interested but doubtful. He protested that he liked school, and he strongly wished he could feel better so that he could attend again. As a matter of fact, his achievement was on a high, acceptable level.

Following a period of silence, Roy said he thought he partially understood the reason for his fear of dying. He was terrified at the possibility of fainting in school and thus of being forced back into the hospital. He could not bear the thought of being separated from his mother, of being isolated in a bed, of being prevented from occupying himself in activity. He could not bear the thought of a free, unscheduled time that would compel him to do more and more things to keep something awful from happening.

Roy's fear of isolation and hospitalization, his fear of forced removal from life, although it increased his anxiety and his need of rituals, was at the same time a healthy sign. To me it meant that Roy was seeking to remain in touch with life, that he wanted to live. Here was an inner awareness of hope and value, of direct involvement in the world, an inner awareness that his salvation lay in being able to participate in life.

Roy then turned to a different problem. He said he was becoming increasingly unhappy with the fact that now he was often losing his temper

with his mother. He was unable to control himself, and he frequently worked himself into a rage against her. It left him frightened and exhausted. I said that I could understand how losing control could be a frightening experience. Sometimes “doing things” was a kind of magic against the inner feelings that might sweep one away. This idea amused him and he smiled for the first time since we met. Sometime later, however, he told me that my explanation that his performing of rituals was a way of making magic was an important insight for him. At once, he felt that the compulsions were less mysterious and alarming.

Roy drew silently for some minutes and then related a dream he had had two nights earlier. He was in a great rage with someone; he thought it might have been his mother. He rushed out of the house, and finding his toboggan, he threw himself onto it. At once, it set off down a slope that grew steeper and steeper. He could see that the path ended in a deep pit, but he was quite powerless to stop the descent of the toboggan. He awoke in terror. To me, the dream gave further insight into his problem. The descent into the pit symbolized the urge to return to the womb of the Great Mother; his anger with his human mother arose through Roy’s struggle with this image and his projection of this image onto his real mother. If this were so, in time I would have to help him to become aware of the inner situation and to see the self-creative striving implicit in his rages. As a first approach to this awareness, I said, “Anger can be good as well as bad, you know. It can be right to be angry

with something that is evil, can't it?" Roy replied, "I hadn't thought of that before." Our time was up now. In leaving Roy remarked that he would continue with his drawing at our next meeting.

The Second Meeting: The Launching of the Ship

Roy began the hour in a quiet way. He completed his drawing, which was a strange, diffuse characterization of a ship. It was a crude, somewhat immature picture, with no distinction between bow and stem. The ship had three funnels and a long row of portholes. He began to paint the ship, and in the process, he completely obliterated the portholes. The middle funnel was much taller than the other two and out of it poured a cloud of dense black smoke. To me, the furious outpouring of the smoke symbolized the negative, incestuous libido. The eradication of the portholes communicated Roy's confused relatedness to outer reality. Of course, I did not interpret any of my impressions to Roy. But suddenly, as I was reflecting, Roy looked directly at me with a definitely cynical smile. I understood its meaning: he was saying, with a dare, "Now, make something out of this!" So I accepted his challenge and, pointing to the drawing, I replied, "The smoke here shows that there is energy and plenty of it. But it is terribly black. This kind of blackness often means that a person has inner thoughts and feelings that he regards as bad. Perhaps you fear your own intense feelings of anger."

Roy immediately reminded me, “You said anger could be good as well as bad.” I answered, “Yes, I did. Are you trying to trip me up? Let me explain. I did not mean that anything is good or bad in itself, not even anger. It is the way in which anger is used that determines whether it is good or bad.”

My comments were met with a lengthy silence but I felt that Roy was reflecting on what I had said to him. Then quite suddenly he began to speak. He began to tell me of a recent dream. In his dream, he was back in school again, extremely frightened and unhappy. As he described his dream, its meaning registered. Would I keep my promise? Would I permit him to decide when he was ready to return to school? His message communicated to me a distrustful attitude. I spoke gently and sensitively, “You aren’t certain that I shall keep my word and wait until you are ready to go back to school.” Roy looked me very full in the face and responded affirmatively, “People do tell lies to children. People do trick children. My mum does. She puts the clock ahead to make me go to bed early. She promises me she won’t leave the house after I’ve gone to bed. Then she does. I come down from my room and she isn’t there. She has gone out. The clock is back to the proper time.”

I became poignantly aware of how we adults, driven into a corner by an importunate child, may hedge and lie as the easiest way of dealing with the problem. I could see in these moments how disturbing this could be to a child, how this could create suspicion, doubt, and distrust. So I responded, “Yes,

Roy, I understand. Parents when pressed sometimes do not tell the truth. But try to see this from your mother's point of view. I am quite sure that she hates deceiving you, but you want to make a prisoner of her. She needs time alone with your father and time to visit her friends. She feels that the only way she can escape is by being sly with you. I am not saying that it is right for her to deceive you, but only trying to help you understand why she is doing it. As for myself, I can only repeat, that as far as I am concerned, when you return to school is entirely up to you. My interest is not in pushing you back into school but in helping you to overcome your fears and rituals and to win back all the energy wasted in making magic."

I then suggested that we return to a study of his painting. Pointing again to the smoke, I said that to me it represented bottled-up energy down below that was not being used to drive the ship properly. The captain was not using it to meet his needs but was putting the energy into irrelevant matters, making magic, in fact. Roy laughed at this explanation and, as our time was up, he went away, saying he was sorry for the poor man.

The Third Meeting: More Magic and More Rituals

Roy selected a large piece of clay, which he fingered and kneaded during the entire visit. He seemed especially tight inside when he began to relate what an awful day the previous Sunday had been. He was in a constant state

of tension on that day; he felt compelled repeatedly to carry out rituals. He was absolutely exhausted and discouraged with the constant effort of having to do things. At last he had gone to bed, morose and weeping. Then further difficulties arose. First, he found it necessary to pray over and over again. With each prayer completed, a new element emerged which made it necessary to pray again. Then, no matter how he arranged his garments and bedclothes, he was not mentally comfortable. Over and over, he changed the arrangement. He felt he would lose his mind completely before he finally settled down and fell asleep.

For me, Roy's tension and despair grew out of the religious atmosphere of Sunday. I asked him if it was possible that what troubled him was the idea that it was God who might make something awful happen to him, some severe punishment, if he omitted any of the rituals. Roy agreed but said that he could think of nothing he had done wrong, nothing that deserved punishment. I asked if going to his mother's bed had anything to do with his fear, since there was such a tremendous amount of magic and ritual surrounding this event. The idea of magic once again amused Roy, but he was not ready to face the archetype of the angry father-god, so he quickly changed the subject.

"If I only had a dog, I could keep busy exercising it, and I wouldn't have to do all these things," he said excitedly. "But," he added, "my parents will not let me bring a dog into the house." I suggested that if he explained his reasons

for wanting a dog, his parents might be willing to get him one. I spoke of the dog's naturalness and gaiety, saying that human beings also have an animal side, which is valuable just because it is natural and free. While we continued discussing ways that animals and humans are alike, Roy modeled "a man." It was a torso with a large bowed head, and it looked exactly like a fetus. I thought that perhaps this symbolized Roy's psychically unborn state or that it might stand for the beginning of a new inner life.

With the close of our meeting, Roy joined his mother. In my presence, he told her that I wanted him to have a dog. Since I felt that this was an issue between them, an issue for which Roy must remain responsible, I pointed out to him that he must discuss this with his mother, that it was a matter to be settled between them.

The Next Three Meetings: Roy's Animal Nature

These hours with Roy revolved around Rex, the year-old terrier which Mrs. J. had purchased immediately following my last session with Roy. I remarked that there were now two kings in his home, Roy and Rex. But we soon found that Rex was kingly only in the way in which very young infants exercise dominion. We decided that if Rex represented Roy's animal side, this must be very young indeed. He himself recognized that in some ways he was very much dependent on his mother. I said, "Yes, indeed, you still feel that you

have to sleep with her.” He took this well and without embarrassment. He mentioned how Rex liked to be in a truck while Roy pushed him about “like a baby in a pram.” In other ways, he recognized his own immaturity. Bearing in mind that I must ultimately help Roy to see why and how he was failing to live his life in accordance with his talents and endowments, I emphasized that growing up was not an easy task. In simple terms, I told him about psychological types and of the fact that some people are born with the ability to come out into the world without fear, while others, like himself, would by nature find facing outer reality, at times, extremely difficult. It was this attitude of reservation and fear that made it seem safer to hide behind one’s mother or some other grown-up. I explained to Roy that, given such a nature, one was not automatically doomed to be burdened or destroyed by it, but, on the contrary, one could live creatively by accepting and honoring it. The innate attitude is natural and valuable if it is not carried to extremes.

Roy mentioned an incident with his mother when he became extremely angry with her. While he was reading a book, he wanted her to turn the pages for him. She refused, and he responded with rage that reached such a pitch that he lost control. I told him I thought this was another example of his immaturity, that he was like a young infant crying with rage because his bottle was not ready, and that, although this represented a problem, it was not the end of the world. If he could recognize it as such and attempt to come to grips with it in its real form, perhaps this would be a first step in growing

up.

Seventh Meeting: The Constructive Use of Anger

Roy began this meeting by making with clay a model of a boxer, which he painted. The model was remarkably spirited and lifelike. He commented that it looked just like a gorilla and waited for my reaction. For me, the model was an externalization of Roy's own shadow side. It represented the image of the 100 per cent brutal male, from whom women instinctively shrink. It was difficult to reconcile the image of the model with the quiet, anxious, handsome boy who sat beside me. Of one thing I was certain, I could not baldly say, "This gorilla-boxer is really what you are rejecting in yourself; it is what you are always trying to magic away." I approached this dimension of Roy by referring to his relatedness with his dog, "In your creation of a gorilla like boxer, you show me that the animal side of you is coming on. The babyish Rex has turned into a very unbabyish gorilla." Roy looked alert as I spoke. He listened attentively as I continued. I pointed out the ways in which animals and human beings were alike, how they shared similar emotions and behaved in similar ways. I pointed out that as human beings grew up from infancy to adulthood, the primitive impulses had to be modified and expressed in more acceptable ways. The problem was that often, through the process of growing up and becoming socialized, children began to think of their animal nature as bad, as evil, and they sometimes tried to eliminate it altogether. I told Roy that

I thought this was a mistake. I told him that, to remain whole as human beings, it was important to retain our animal natures and use these natural energies in creative and constructive ways.

Roy said that he could understand just what I meant. Then he grinned broadly and said, “Rut I still do not see how getting angry can ever be a good thing.” To this, I explained, “You’re interested in boxing. You know that, when a boxer hits his opponent in anger and gives him a foul blow, the boxer is disqualified. Rut when he puts his aggressiveness into a constructive determination to win, he uses his anger in a socially acceptable way.” Roy nodded affirmatively. As he was leaving, he handed me his model of the boxer and asked me to take good care of it.

Eighth Meeting: A Touch of Therapeutic Significance

Roy began the hour by telling me that during the week he had discovered how to be a good boxer, how to put his anger into constructive actions. In moments of rage, he had chopped up wood for the fireplace; he had kicked his football about; he had shadowboxed. In the process, he came to realize that he had forgotten about his rituals. At such times, he no longer had to make magic. He had more time for his own important interests. I took this opportunity to show him another consequence of his compulsive behavior. I explained to him, “How right you are, Roy! Making magic is horribly time-

wasting. It fills one's life with meaningless actions and is used to avoid anything important. You can dodge all responsibility with the excuse that you have to 'do things' from morning until night." Putting aside further discussion on this need to magic away his fears, I then asked Roy what he really wanted to do.

He answered my question saying that he would like to take up scouting again. As he talked, he modeled a scout camp. He was certainly not ready to return to school yet, but he could revisit the scout hut. I felt so encouraged by this hopeful sign of active return to life that I spontaneously, warmly, put my hand on his shoulder and told him that I wished him luck in this venture. Usually, I am careful not to touch adolescents at all, and I immediately wondered whether I had not made a mistake. I was, therefore, quite relieved and joyful when Roy did not shrink away from me; indeed he leaned toward me and, for the first time, genuinely smiled. *I realized that, in this spontaneous moment of touching him, I had accepted the shadow in Roy which I had previously rejected and found unpleasing.* As he left, I said jokingly, "Be sure to take the gorilla-boxer to the scout hut with you. He could become a very energetic and valuable member of the troop." Roy was delighted with the idea and with the moment we shared. He went away making unrestrained sparring movements.

Tenth Meeting: A Test of Freedom and Courage

In this meeting, Roy recounted his experiences in the scout hut. The scouts had been studying tracking and Indian life. Roy told of a dream in which his home was attacked by “red Indians.” But, in the dream, although he was frightened, he did not go to pieces. He held together. He talked about the Indian way of life and said that he admired the freedom and courage of the Indian. Then, with a provocative smile, he said, “And the children don’t have to go to school.” This gave me an opening to discuss with him the matter of being ready to suffer in order to mature. I reminded him that Indian boys had to pass some very stiff tests, had to leave blood behind, so to speak, in growing up. Then they were ready to enter the world of adults and warriors. Roy listened attentively and caught the meaning in my message. He was busily engaged in modeling a pipe of peace. I remarked that, sometimes, when you have a battle with someone, it can be settled amicably. Perhaps he wanted to smoke the pipe of peace with his enemies. Perhaps the gorilla-boxer was turning into the free, courageous red Indian, and now he was coming to terms with it. Was he accepting his forward-striving animal nature instead of having to magic it away all the time? Roy understood my thought and stated that he was not able to give up any of the rituals as yet, but they were receding in importance. He now had to repeat each ritual only once or twice, rather than over and over again.

With the completion of this meeting, the Easter holiday began. I suggested to Roy that, when we met again in three weeks, we could look more

deeply into the magic and the rituals and see what still had to be controlled by them.

Eleventh Meeting: The Crocodile and the Return to School

Roy was particularly quiet and uneasy in the first minutes of our meeting, after a three-week interval. He reported that he had not returned to school for the beginning of the new term nor had he been able to sleep apart from his mother. After telling me this, he began modeling a crocodile, making it with a wide-open mouth. He then told me he felt increasingly anxious and worried. At first, he had liked coming to see me because he felt safe in my room. But now he was experiencing a sense of panic and physical illness. It began just before his vacation and had at this moment reached a peak. He couldn't breathe in my room. He felt shut in. He experienced a feeling of gloom, darkness, stuffiness. After a prolonged silence, I suggested that he speak freely, whatever thoughts came into his mind. He told me he had seen a crocodile at a local zoo during the holiday. To him it was a horrible creature lying quietly, completely still, creating a deceptive log like appearance, waiting for a victim whom it would swallow alive.

I told Roy that I thought this was an especially important incident and I would like to attempt to explain its meaning. Part of him wanted to grow up, return to school, and live a normal active life with all of its discomforts and

joys. But part of him wished to remain a baby, enclosed in a warm, motherly atmosphere. This was the struggle going on within him now, the struggle between the darkness and the light. This was what it was like to be swallowed whole by a crocodile, darkness and comfort, but at the same time stuffiness and a wish to emerge into life. This was the situation he was experiencing in my room, at this very moment, a feeling of darkness; yet, in actuality, the room was flooded with sunshine which beckoned him. A look of amazed understanding and acceptance spread across Roy's face. Immediately, he stood up to go, with an expression of determination and decision. Our time was not up, but Roy was definitely bringing the meeting to a close. I told him that I would pass his house in a few days and would bring his model to him. Roy said airily, with the door half open, that he would be glad to have the crocodile, but that he might not be home when I called. *The next morning he returned to school.*

Though Roy had taken an important step toward self recovery, I still felt that I had to help him face the archetype of the Great Mother. But, for the moment, I was satisfied to have used the model and his feeling about my room to symbolize the unconscious into which the backward-drawing infant was pulling him. Roy could face the conflict between the forces of immaturity and regression and the forward-striving sources within himself. But he still had to come to grips with the Great Mother which was behind his inability to get out of his real mother's bed.

Twelfth Meeting: The Angry God

Roy was proud that he had returned to school and was able to remain there in spite of the increased discomfort and anxiety. His rituals returned in full force, though not with the same degree of frequency. The fear stayed with him that, if he omitted even one ritual, he was faced with disaster and death. Why should this fear, this ominous danger persist?

I reminded Roy of our conclusion that he thought God was angry with him and that he was afraid God would make bad things happen to him as a punishment. He commented, "Yes, I used to think that. It's funny, I *know* now that it isn't true, but I still *feel* that it is."

I suggested that we consider when God was angry in the Old Testament. I explained as simply as I could that the Israelites had been chosen by God to live a certain way of life and to serve Him alone, to hold no other gods before Him. God became angry with the Israelites when they fell away from this commandment, when they broke the pattern and searched back after other gods. But when we really examine the Old Testament, we see that the anger is always followed by forgiveness, not punishment and retribution. The person must recognize his backsliding and be sorry for it. He must atone for it. Then I exclaimed, "Isn't it ridiculous to think that such a God would punish a boy unless he always put on his left shoe before his right or unless he pointed his pen at a particular knob on a cupboard before putting it down? Isn't it

ridiculous to think that you need to make magic against God?"

These explanations seemed to hit home with Roy. At this moment he sneezed, and spontaneously I said, "Bless you!" Then I added, "There! Now I am making magic. We all do it at times." Roy laughed out loud and left the meeting chuckling. My involuntary piece of superstition had made the whole question of magic a little comic and thus less alarming. At all events, he resolved to end the rituals, and though he experienced considerable anxiety at first, he continued living with the feeling, facing the issue, and taking responsibility himself for his actions. Following this meeting Roy performed no more rituals, though he was, at times, aware of the impulse to do so.

Thirteenth Meeting: The Image of Mother and Father

In the meetings with Roy, I had looked for an opportunity to constellate the image of the good father. At the same time, I recognized that, in approaching this theme, instead I might activate the image of the angry, exacting father.

By this time I had a clear picture of Mr. J., not only from Mrs. J.'s interviews with the psychiatric social worker but also from Roy's spontaneous remarks. At times, he had complained about his father's insistence on tidiness, extreme politeness, and perfect table manners. I understood from our reports that Mr. J. was not neurotic although he was

over particular, fastidious, and, at times, too demanding. Certainly these attitudes did not constructively aid Roy in dealing with his compulsions. At times, Roy spoke rather wistfully of his many friends who went fishing with their fathers or who were taken by them to football and cricket matches. He said that his father never cared about any of these activities. He cared only about reading and gardening, neither of which he shared with Roy. Mrs. J. communicated that her husband did not think that the raising of children was his responsibility. He felt that his task was to provide materially for them but that the nurture, training, recreation, and *schooling* of the children were tasks for mothers and teachers. In his own way, he was fond of the children but rather remote and undemonstrative. Finally, and perhaps most significant, Mr. J. was entirely content to go on sleeping alone in Roy's room. Neither he nor his wife saw anything odd or questionable in a boy of twelve sharing his mother's bed. Consequently, I finally concluded that there was little in the home to constellate the image of the father who is proud of his children, able to enter into their world, and concerned with their progress toward maturity.

Yet in spite of the apparently impoverished father image in the home, Roy's activities in therapy were highly reassuring. His interests again and again pointed to a masculine identification. In this meeting he had turned from modeling to paint a most phallic-looking space ship, a greatly inflated masculine symbol, prepared to attack the heavens. In referring to the space ship, I said, "So Dan Dare is off again!" Roy seemed surprised that I knew this

popular figure from a boys' weekly magazine. He remarked that his father thought comics were rubbish. I explained that sometimes men outgrow comics, but that most women admired adventurous men, even in comics. At this point, I had in mind Jung's description of the mother of the hero, in which he states:

Man leaves the mother, the source of libido, and is driven by the eternal thirst to find her again, and to drink renewal from her; thus he completes his cycle, and returns into the mother's womb. Every obstacle which obstructs his life's path, and threatens his ascent, wears the shadowy features of the "terrible mother," who paralyses his energy with the consuming poison of the stealthy, retrospective longing. In each conquest he wins again the smiling love and life-giving mother.¹

It must, I thought, be my function to constellate this image in Roy's mind. But I soon realized that I must create and clarify the image of the good father who helps his son discover the life-giving mother by progressively drawing him into the world of men. This became primarily a matter of accepting, valuing, and sharing Roy's own self-chosen activities as he created and painted spaceships, bombers, battleships, cricket and football matches, and racing cars. We often talked about airmen, sailors, and sportsmen.

During these weeks Roy's compulsions finally disappeared. His fear of dying no longer held such power over him. He attended school regularly and enjoyed the many scout adventures, including a ten-day camp expedition. The one problem that still persisted was Roy's continued dependence on his

mother and his retreat into his mother's bed. This was an attachment which his mother, in her own way, was encouraging. As Roy evolved more and more healthy patterns of relating and living, his mother began to manifest unconscious disapproval and resistance. She came late for her own appointments and was obviously responsible for Roy's constant tardiness. My colleagues and I felt that this was not so much due to her fear of losing Roy as that Roy and I were very close to understanding a crucial problem which was also her own. She knew we were working on his infantile mother fixation, which was precisely the net in which she was caught up with her own mother. It was this situation, their mutual inability to separate from the Great Mother, that was holding Roy back from a full restoration of his talents and powers.

Twenty-Third Meeting: Facing the Problem of the Great Mother

Although we skirted the issue of the Great Mother many times before this meeting, it was an area in which I had to tread warily. But, in this meeting, we came to grips with the problem openly and directly. At an opportune moment, I asked Roy why he continued to sleep with his mother. He said that his mother was lonesome because she missed her mother and, therefore, she needed him. But, as for himself, he could return to his own room anytime he wished. When we explored this further, he admitted that he too abhorred the thought of having to be quite alone at night. I knew that he was struggling to move forward in all areas. I pointed out to him that being

alone at times was inevitable, that it was a requirement of living. I explained that growing up was always a struggle and that to be a man he would have to leave the security of a protected childhood behind. I added that both his parents wanted this for him. They looked forward to the time when he would leave the dependent, childish path and become a real companion to them. Roy was interested in this idea, that emancipation from his mother could result in a mature friendship. I stressed the fact that a new kind of relationship with his mother could be rich and rewarding, not only for him but for his mother as well. Roy listened and seemed to be reflecting upon my statements.

At the end of this meeting, Roy told me he had been given four demerits for “horse-playing with other boys.” My comment slipped out, “Good for you. I bet they are the first you’ve ever been given.” He answered, “Yes. But I’m sure they won’t be the last.”

Twenty-Fifth Meeting: The Fear Is the Wish Inside-Out

Roy was now coming to see me only once every three weeks. Just before this meeting, he had fallen off his bicycle, cut his face badly, and dislocated an elbow. In spite of this frightening accident, Roy’s fear of dying did not return nor did the rituals. But a new and distressing problem emerged: Roy was now afraid that his mother might be killed in an accident. He became extremely anxious whenever she was out of the house for any length of time. I decided

the time had come to discuss this fixation with him. I reminded him of our talk about his crocodile model and how my room had seemed dark and stuffy to him. We had understood from this theme that the growing resources in himself were in conflict with inner pressures and pulls to remain a baby. He wanted to be mothered, and at the same time he blamed his mother for keeping him a baby, for imprisoning him in the dark, and for being the key by which he could escape fear and return to light. The image of an imprisoning mother became fixed in his mind. It became painted over to cover Mrs. J., even though she did not wish to keep Roy dependent on her, did not want him to remain a baby.

I wanted Roy to understand that the growing aspects of himself came to hate the picture of the possessive mother, and that the feeling, at times, was very intense. So the fear that his mother might be killed was actually a wish that she would die, a wish to escape once and forever the imprisoning mother. I re-emphasized that anger could have positive implications, but that his anger was directed toward an imagined possessiveness, a fantasied mother, that he was attacking a pictured mother concocted out of fear and desperation. Roy responded immediately to my explanation, saying that he understood what I meant.

Twenty-Eighth Meeting: The Initiation

Though much change had occurred in Roy's school and personal life, he had still not given up sleeping with his mother. I realized that, *though his parents were passively willing for him to mature, there was not sufficient strength of determination and conviction in either of them, actively to initiate him.* Mrs. J., though making progress in therapy, was still caught in her own fixation; Mr. J. was, as ever, remote, absorbed in his own world. I, then and there, in this meeting, suddenly, spontaneously, acting under the strongest sense of need, took it upon myself to initiate Roy in his growth toward independence and maturity.

I asked Roy to consider once again his red Indian dream. I reminded him that Indian youths had to undergo severe tests before they were accepted as warriors by the men of the tribe. I detailed to him some of the ordeals that the Navaho Indian had to meet and master. I explained that all primitive peoples introduced their youths into maturity by setting arduous, painful tasks which had to be struggled with, endured, and eventually conquered. The whole purpose of these ordeals was to help young people to realize that they could not remain infants but that fulfillment of initiation rites in the achievement of manhood required effort and exertion. Young people learned these lessons for themselves. They accepted their terror and suffering and *they did not run away or hide.* They stayed with the tasks, endured the ordeals, met the requirements of life to growing maturity. They accepted everything because it proved to themselves and to the community that they were worthy to be

called men and women. I said to Roy, affirmatively, and with conviction, "I am absolutely certain that the time is coming, and coming soon, when you will go back to your own room, not because you are no longer afraid, but even though you are still very frightened indeed, you will take this step as a requirement of growing up, of becoming a man."

Roy did not speak a single word. Although our time was not over, he jumped up, clattered down the stairs, climbed on his bicycle, and hurriedly rode away.

I was not at all sure of the meaning of this outburst. And, in the next twenty-four hours, I spent much time reflecting and wondering and worrying whether I had not been precipitous, whether my initiation was more in the nature of a psychic death rather than a new birth. But, the next day, the merit of my spontaneous action was confirmed. *Mrs. J. telephoned to say that Roy was back in his own room.*

Now all of Roy's original problems had been resolved. He did not again return to his mother's bed. The separation was, at first, quite painful, but he had stuck it out and was glad to be on his own. Roy and I met a few more times and then agreed that he would come and see me once each term just to report on major events in his life. He came two more times and then decided to terminate our meetings altogether. He felt he could manage his life on his

own.

Nine years have passed since Roy attended the clinic, but I have up-to-date news of him. There has been no return of the neurosis, except for a slight tendency to compulsions on the eve of important examinations. He is nearing the end of his apprenticeship in a highly skilled trade, having passed his examinations with an average mark of 80 per cent. He rides freely about on a motor bicycle and has spent some holidays in Europe with friends. He is particularly fond of a special young lady whom he hopes to marry when fully qualified in his occupation.

Notes

1 Carl Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious* (London: Kegan Paul, 1933), pp. 235-236.

References

- Burton, A. "Beyond the Transference." *Psychotherapy, Theory, Research and Practice*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1964.
- Butler, J.M. "Client-Centered Counseling and Psychotherapy." In D. Brower and L.E. Abt (Eds.), *Progress in Clinical Psychology*, Vol. III. Changing Conceptions in Psychotherapy. New York, Grune & Stratton, 1958.
- Gendlin, E.T. *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*, New York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1962.
- Gendlin, E.T. "A Theory of Personality Change." Chapter in *Personality Change*, Worchel and Byrne (Eds.), Wiley, New York, 1964.
- Gendlin, E.T. "Experiencing: A Variable in the Process of Therapeutic Change." *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol. XV, No. 2, 1961.
- Gendlin, E.T. "Subverbal Communication and Therapist Expressivity Trends in Client-Centered Therapy with Schizophrenics." *Journal of Existential Psychiatry*, Vol. IV, No. 14, 1963.
- Gendlin, E.T. "Schizophrenia: Problems and Methods of Psychotherapy." *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1964.
- Gendlin, E.T. "Values and the Process of Experiencing." In *The Goals of Psychotherapy*, A. Mahrer (Ed.) In Press.
- Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, Harper & Row, New York, 1962.
- Jung, C.G. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, Meridian, New York, 1956.
- Rank, O. *Will Therapy*, Knopf, New York, 1950.
- Rogers, C.R. *Client-Centered Therapy*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1951.

Rogers, C.R. *On Becoming a Person*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1961.

Sartre, J.P. *Being and Nothingness*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1956.

Sullivan, H.S. *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*, Norton, New York, 1953.