

The Importance of Being Open: Treatment of a Case of Shame, Obligation Guilt, and Obsessional Doubt

by Thomas Rosbrow, Ph.D.

DRAFT- NOT FOR QUOTATION OR ATTRIBUTION

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Introduction

In this paper I will present the ongoing treatment of a young man, Carl, who entered treatment in a paralyzed, obsessive state, characterized by severe self doubt about his work and his family relations. His sense of self was continuously undermined by the undercutting of his ideas by his parents', particularly mother's, total immunity to any form of criticism or disagreement by him. This led to a vulnerability in his sense of reality (Shane, Shane, and Gales, 1997), in that he was eaten up by doubt regarding his values and personal choices. His fears and sensations of being wrong, weak, and unsuccessful made him exquisitely prone to feelings of shame, specifically embarrassment over perceived failure. His case illustrates prototypical themes about the circular, oscillating relationship between shame and guilt which I have observed in other patients with similar familial constellations.

He showed a particular form of guilt, here termed *obligation guilt*, which was a response to a sequence of feeling shamed, followed by parentally induced guilt. Weakened and momentarily shocked by shame caused by familial criticism and rejection, he was vulnerable to accepting parental attributions of wrongdoing or disloyalty. Obligation guilt is rooted in shame - in feeling failed and doubting one's judgement and competence. This guilty and insecure position constitutes a temporary self-state. The guilt-ridden state then leads to a more lasting painful core of obsessional doubt and rumination.

Obligation guilt can be usefully contrasted to the well-understood concepts of survivor guilt and separation guilt (Modell, 1984; Weiss and Sampson, 1986; Friedman, 1985), where person is intensely concerned with anxiety over hurting and depriving others. With obligation guilt, the other is perceived as impervious, even if narcissistically upset. The person suffers guilt not over damaging the other, but about breaking ranks and being wrong. Perceiving oneself as wrong undermines a person's sense of confidence and efficacy, and leads to a dreaded image of the self as indecisive and failed.

As an alternative to this intolerable, shame-ridden state, the person resorts at other times to character defenses of compulsive self-reliance (Bowlby, 1980) or self-sufficiency (Modell, 1984), where one imagines oneself to be free of other's opinions and judgements, and possessing superior judgment to which others should submit- an identification with the omnipotent, critical parent. Carl would vacillate between two disparate personas: a self-assured, aloof, cocky man of the world who operated on his own with little need for mentors or colleagues, or, a frightened, intimidated, young man who did not trust his own instincts or ideas and was indecisive and overwhelmed.

In looking at the sequence of shame, guilt, and doubt, I am indebted to the pioneering work of Lewis (1971), who carefully delineated repetitive sequences of shame, rage, and guilt. Her emphasis on sequences has been followed in the work of Lansky (1992) and Schickel (1990). In the sequence she observed, shame is an intolerable affect which changes inexorably and reflexively into rage, which functions to protect the self against further injury. The person often is horrified at the extent of this rage, and then feels guilty for wanting to attack and hurt the person who caused the shame. This guilt depletes any sense of healthy self-assertiveness, the person feels weakened, and is vulnerable to being again shamed. The

cycle is set to begin anew. In this formulation, guilt is secondary in importance, a byproduct of the destructive effects of shame-rage.

In his discussion of tragic and guilty man, Kohut (1982) also saw guilt as a less significant psychological force than shame. Droga and Kaufman (1994) tried to correct the self-psychologist's valorizing of shame over guilt by referring to the guilt of tragic man, looking at underlying pattern of separation guilt and survivor guilt in some narcissistic personalities.

The pattern observed with Carl, and other patients, has a different script, although the process begins with a painful experience of being shamed by someone, as in Lewis' formulation. Both Lewis and Kohut contrast guilt with shame, emphasizing shame's connoting diminished self-worth as opposed to guilt's connoting destructive feelings and their opposition by the superego. In the sequence observed in this paper, obligation guilt gives form to the inchoate pain of shame, and is a response to the criticisms of caretakers. In this dynamic, shame and guilt are interconnected threads weaving together the particular pattern of a person's sense of failure and wrongdoing, with either experience potentially in foreground or background.

The other major emphasis of this paper is on the mutative effect of taking an open, self-disclosing stance as a basic analytic attitude. To be warmly interested and responsive to a patient's questions and interests is arguably a better starting point than to begin from a stance of neutrality and anonymity. If a major goal and ongoing process in treatment is the development of a new, safer, relationship with the therapist, then the therapist's capacity to be vividly present as a real, useable person is essential. Of course, the degree to which the analyst may reveal values, opinions, or interests will vary according to the patient's needs

and wishes for mutuality, intimacy, privacy, or autonomy- and the patient's needs for distance. But it may be better to begin from a position of friendly openness rather than cautious neutrality, and to adjust one's bearings from that baseline. In working with Carl, I made the error of being too distant and non-disclosing in the first sessions- potentially leading to a flat unproductive treatment- but quickly reoriented myself to a different more openly related position, which helped the treatment open up and grow.

Case Presentation

At the start of treatment, Carl's presentation of self was reserved, tense, and marked by insistent questioning of my opinions and ideas. Early on, I decided to be forthcoming in response to his requests and explicit about my point of view. Primarily, I felt that not doing so would make treating him either impossible or at best result in a constricted, minimally beneficial therapeutic relationship. From his life history, I inferred that he needed someone to be open with him in a genuine and spontaneous way, because an identity as the outsider, the excluded one, was a core part of his shame-ridden, obsessional self-experience.

Carl is a 28 year old venture capitalist, from a prominent professional family. His father is a successful lawyer and academic, and his mother is a lawyer and political consultant. Both parents come from comfortable backgrounds, though the father had a traumatic childhood, and takes a decided back seat in running the family. Carl experiences his mother as always being cuttngly critical towards him, and as believing she knows what is right on huge range of matters, from personal to financial to political. During much of his life, he has struggled with his mother's advice and admonitions, alternating between being irritated and indignant, or else feeling bowled over by the force of her arguments and her certainty, and

doubting his own perceptions and worth. This alternation of moods goes along with an obsessional process of severe doubting and worrying about both past and present decisions

Particularly deflating to his sense of self-esteem have been constant comparisons, made by himself and his mother, between himself and his year older brother. Though Carl was a successful student, including graduate education, he could never match his brother's stellar accomplishments. Carl did well enough, but had to work hard to do so. He found elementary school very stressful and felt like a failure, though he did well in high school, college, and graduate work. His brother was a whiz from an early age, always won top honors, and has a distinguished academic and professional career. Carl says his mother was and is wildly excited about everything his brother does, while she is muted and skeptical about his accomplishments and aspirations. He reports that even when his brother and he performed equally, his mother would praise the brother excitedly and with a proud tone never used with him.

His memories of his childhood have a dour cast to them, involving feelings of strain in to keep up at school and feeling estranged at home. He recently described with a sense of relish seeing pictures of himself on family vacations scowling while others smiled; the pictures validated his ideas of being apart and unhappy compared to everyone else. The pictures confirmed his opinions about his past; they were important to him because he always doubts whether his impressions and intuitions are accurate.

During late childhood or early adolescence he began to develop ideas about becoming business mogul, and would imagine ideas of businesses he could create. These ideas are still very powerful and compelling to him today. When he would express his fantasies he experienced them as met with derision by his mother. She regarded his ideas as too

grandiose, too unrealistic - who was he to set his sights so high . Equally important, his parents were disdainful of the business world; the world of commerce was way below the world of academic law and professional life. So Carl ended up feeling like a joke when he exposed his dreams. Not to say that he gave them up, or gave up talking about them. Rather expressing his dreams, and arguing about them with his mother, became alternately a playground or battleground for him. Doing this seemed to help him stake his own territory and in that sense feel stronger and separate, but the disparagement he received hurt him and made him wonder about the value of his aspirations. What worked in these dreams of the future was the notion that if he succeeded, he would wind up better off and more powerful than his parents - no longer vulnerable to being looked down upon, or dependent on them.

Over the years, Carl continued to pursue his business ideas, but also was influenced by and susceptible to his mother's opinions in ways that undermined him and laid him open to his own self-doubts and disappointments with himself. After college, he spent a couple of years working in a commercial field which he found exciting, more than work he has done since, and where he felt he was doing well. He looked into finding a way to buy a business in this field, and thought about how to finance it. Whether this goal was realistic or not is hard to tell. At this point, he describes being steered by his mother into giving up what he was doing and going to graduate school to study economics, with the idea that in the long run this was necessary. He did so reluctantly and joylessly, and still wonders if he made a huge mistake by leaving the one job he fully enjoyed.

After going back to school, he has worked in different settings in the commercial world. His first two experiences were bitter disappointments to him, in large organizations where he felt insignificant, stifled and bored. He found corporate culture excessively

conformist and controlling, bristled at the structure, and had tense relations with one boss.

At the same time, he began a relationship with the woman he eventually married. In the relationship, he broke a pattern of being ruled by his parents' expectations in regard to his girlfriends. Previously, he would bring a girlfriend home to meet his parents with a need to win his parents' approval. Instead his parents would find flaws with whomever he brought. Later, he would be swayed by their objections and lose interest in the person. With his wife-to-be he had the presence of mind to anticipate this would happen. He deliberately waited some time for them to meet her, determined that their opinion wouldn't make any difference to him; in fact, he would actively avoid hearing or soliciting their opinions of her.

After his marriage, he moved back to the area of the country where he grew up. He wanted to make a new start professionally, but also felt a strong pull to live near his family despite his awareness of his conflicts with them. Looking forward to having children, he had the idea that he should be near his parents, who could be supportive grandparents. He also pictured they would be helpful to him financially, although he feared that they would also be intrusive and make too many social demands on him. There was an element of guilt in his motives, in that he felt a vague but pressing sense of obligation to live near his parents.

Carl had been back home for several months at the time that he began treatment with me. He had been in treatment for about a year before moving with a psychoanalyst whom I knew. His manner on the phone and in his first appointments was breezy and casual. In early sessions, I experienced him as warding off imminent embarrassment over having problems and presenting a forced self-assured veneer. However, he was open about feeling pressured

and anxious at work and in his relations with his wife and parents, and was able to describe his problems and their origins in a lucid organized narrative.

He was working in a smaller more collegial setting where he felt more comfortable, but was agitated about not making the needed effort in his work, which involved a great deal of initiative. He described being frozen at his desk worrying, and not getting enough done, which then made him more anxious. He was unable to give himself any positive credit for successes at work, relentlessly critiquing every aspect of his performance, and then becoming frightened that his higher ups might view him the same way and that his job could be endangered. In contrast to this anxiety soaked story, when I asked him detailed questions about what he was doing at work, in order to get a sense of how poorly things might be going, I got the opposite picture- he came across as diligent, focused, and good at what he was doing, and others perceived him that way. However, his professional work was impeded by his nervousness and obsessiveness, as he did waste large amounts of time worrying and procrastinating.

At this moment, his wife was just moving to be with him, taking some time to leave her previous job, where she had been happy and successful. She relocated without relish, responding to his forceful, insistent, pressure with a guarded agreement that they would see this would work, and if not move elsewhere. She saw his family as controlling and imperious, and was explicit that if she lived near them, she would set limits on how much to relate to them. Particularly, she did not accept the responsibility of having to call the parents and be solicitous of them, nor of frequently visiting them or running errands for them -which his parents solicited. This immediately created strain between Carl and his parents, especially his mother. She quickly took offence at the daughter-in-law's attitude, and would

call Carl at his office to complain about his wife's behavior, and how his wife didn't like him. He felt beleaguered and confused in being caught in this crossfire, since whatever he did that pleased one person angered the other.

So at the start of therapy, Carl was feeling pressured on all sides, and filled with doubt about whatever he was doing. But in sessions his manner was for the most part casual. His anxiety showed in a couple of characteristic ways. In an obsessive style, he had a hard time leaving sessions, repetitively going over what we had discussed, or asking me to repeat something I had said; he might leave the session, and return to the open office door a few seconds later to do this. More difficult to me, he would frequently ask for my opinion about his problems, what I thought about what he was saying, what I thought he should do, or, more uncomfortably for me, whether I had ever experienced anything like what he was going through, at work and with his family.

I found all of these questions arduous. On an emotional level, his questions were asked in what I experienced as an insistent tone. My hesitation to answer made him more stiff and colder, and I felt pressured by him to do something I didn't understand. I formulated that there was a quality of turning passive into active in his questions- that he was putting me on the defensive about my work and my techniques similarly to how he felt grilled and criticized by his mother. But even if true, this inference didn't help me figure out how to respond helpfully to him. I had the uneasy feeling that we weren't clicking, and felt inhibited and confused about giving him the kind of "advice" he was continuously requesting. I did feel empathic to his sense of being constantly belittled and bossed around in his family, but this wasn't providing me with cues as to how to proceed.

decided to talk with his previous therapist, someone I know and respect. Telling him about my discomfort and perplexity in treating Carl was surprisingly helpful. The analyst described a similar experience of finding Carl in his words “not easy to like”. He had worked by being more of a counselor more than as analyst, encouraging and facilitating his making decisions about his life. A lot of their work had dealt with his job situation, where Carl had been provocative with his boss, and in letting himself leave this position.

What was most illuminating or liberating for me, was hearing the analyst’s talking about Carl being “not easy to like”. This validated my uneasiness with him, my sense of feeling pressured. The other important idea was what the analyst said about assuming a counseling role. This did not serve as a model as to how engage with Carl, but for some reason gave me a feeling of freedom to play with how to do so. I decided that the only chance to make the treatment work was to relate to Carl in a much freer and open way than I had. This would involve answering his questions, including personal ones, frankly. The difference for me was in deciding too answer the personal ones, about whether I had experiences similar to his, as well as address his questions about my opinions of what he was doing in his life in a full-blooded way, without as much concern as I usually have about imposing my opinion. While I had moved a great deal out of a counterquestioning analytic incognito stance in my work, he stretched the limits of what I usually answered or self-disclosed, especially in a context where I was feeling pressured, rather than relaxed.

This shift in therapeutic stance was based on the intuitive feel that something dramatically different needed to happen for a mutative relationship to take place, and also on my understanding of his position in his family, and of his associated sense of self, or

organizing principles. He felt profoundly excluded from the emotional and intellectual culture of his family, like a man without a country. He was used to his ideas and dreams being met with scorn. Regarding his incessant questioning of me, I constructed that he experienced no one in his family as ever in the same world as himself, and that he never experienced anyone he looked up to being open with him in a way that took into consideration what he was feeling and what his aspirations were. His mother could be cruelly frank and direct with him, but always in the service of reinforcing her superior judgment and life experience. So while he was accustomed to being criticized, he had very little opportunity to take in and use anyone else's perspective, since he reflexively reacted aversively to feedback. To form a more secure attachment and feel more confident, he needed to have a new experience of being a part of an open system with another person, where each person would be honest and articulate about one's own point of view but also able to be cognizant of the other person's perceptions.

After going through this process of self analysis and reconceptualizing, I was consistently open and direct with Carl. I answered questions regarding my life, including my marriage, parents and in-laws, directly as they related to his ongoing conflicts between his wife and his parents. I told him that I had some similar though not identical experiences in mediating loyalty conflicts after getting married, describing them quite briefly- including what was similar and different - without much personal detail. This was said in a very few sentences, but doing so immediately changed the rapport between us. Carl's mood lightened appreciatively, going from grim and defensive to bright and warmly related. He did not push for more self-revelation (my fear) but was able to work more productively on how to do fix the situation between himself, his parents, and his wife. He began to relate to me in a friend

way, smiling and relaxing in sessions, and seeing me as someone whose opinion were sought and valued. From complaining about the need for more feedback, he now often expressed thanks for my help at the end of sessions.

With his struggles at work and in his personal life, I offered a mixture of advice or support mixed with interpretations of his conflicts and vulnerabilities. I was far more explicit than usual in suggesting my own point of view out of the conviction that not doing so left him feeling unaccepted, unhelped and excluded, as discussed earlier. To avoid unduly influencing or imposing my views of values on him, I was explicit with him that I was sharing my one point of view based on my own ideas and personal experience, that it may not be applicable to him, and he had to make up his own mind. In other words, I presented my ideas in a frank, first person way, to acknowledge my potential bias, as well as to give him the more reciprocal experience he requested.

Regarding his work anxiety, I suggested strategies for modulating his anxiety making phone calls, where he felt paralyzed by self-doubt. We worked on elaborating his unformulated fears of appearing stupid and ill-informed to smarter people on the other end of the phone, making connections to his constant comparisons of himself with his brother. Sharing and elaborating his anxiety in a thorough detailed manner served to get him out of feeling stuck rather quickly. Though he remained anxious at times, he began assiduously plowing away at this aspect of his job, and his effectiveness increased quickly. Again, he went from appearing ashamed and very constricted, and distant from me when first describing his work symptoms to being related in a friendly way as he began to feel an increased sense of competence.

The other important piece in disentangling him from his parents in relationship to his marriage came through my offering him, over time, my perspective on his situation in a direct, plain way. His wife was insistent that she could not tolerate being subservient to his parents, was homesick for her previous life, and resentful over being pressured to move. Carl would try to convince her of how the move was for her own good, and reacted to her unhappiness by trying to make her see things differently, which increased the strain between them. Though rigid in his interaction with her, I sensed that he felt badly about how she felt but could not acknowledge it because he feared she would then be more set against him. The pattern of trying to push his ideas onto her followed the mother's pattern of always being right, and was familiar to me in how I at first felt pushed by him.

I identified this pattern to him in terms of his trying to make her see things his way, and how this contributed more strain to their relationship rather than facilitating them being closer or communicating better. I shared my opinion that for them to get along better he needed to: a) let her fully express her own point of view, and listen to it as equally valid to his own, b) if he was forced to make choices between his mother and his wife, he would have to set up a boundary separating he and his wife from his original family for their marriage to work out, if that was his goal, c) recognize that the decision to move here was done hastily and under duress, and that he and his wife should openly look at whether this was working out, and come to mutual decisions over time about their life plans, including the possibility of moving elsewhere if she was not happy here. I told him my sense that he feared if he did not try to force his opinion, he would have to give in to his wife's, an understandable assumption from battling with his mother. Though that was true in that relationship, it was an unhelpful

model for his marriage, where hopefully they could learn to listen to one another and make decisions collaboratively, with neither being the loser at the other's expense.

He listened to this feedback avidly, actively asking questions, going over what I was saying, making sure he got it right. I worried that he could experience this feedback as a narcissistic injury, especially around pointing out how much he pressured his wife, and tried to force his point of view upon her. Instead, he was buoyed by having more ways to talk with his wife, and heartened by her response. Instead of the feared submission to her ideas, talking more openly and solicitously with her quickly broke the tension between them. She was appreciative and relieved by his different approach, and they were able to feel closer and back on track together. These gains have held over the next two years of treatment, including their joyously having a child, and negotiating inevitable hurdles in relationship to the baby's grandparents.

Discussion

Having presented highlights of Carl's treatment, I will now discuss his treatment to illustrate a complex of ideas regarding the psychodynamics of shame, guilt, and cumulative trauma, and related technical issues. Each person is unique, as is each treatment. The analyst's personality, and the match with the patient's, both limits and facilitates what happens. But the psychodynamics of a case often can usefully be formulated in a more general sense, to clarify themes common to other cases.

The case of Carl illustrates subtle nuances of the sequential relationship between shame and guilt, and their role in the formation of obsessional symptoms. His shame and guilt are in the context of his enmeshment with his mother's rigid narcissistic manner. Looking at his treatment supports an argument for a view of chronic or cumulative psychological trauma along a continuum from subtle to severe. Although he was not grossly traumatized nor is he severely disturbed, the dynamics of control, humiliation, and induced guilt with which he struggles are milder variants of dynamics seen in cases of grosser pathology including abuse. Both interpreting and counteracting the crippling mixture of shame and guilt becomes a primary task of treatment, necessarily involving both understanding and new experience.

A basic theme in his life is the experience of being with a dominant parent who is immune to criticism. His mother's incapacity to ever be wrong, and her intolerance and indignation over any difference or criticism expressed by Carl, has darkened Carl's moods and inhibited his sense of competence and pursuance of his life goals. I use the word "immune" because of the parent's impenetrability, and the child's sense of both never having a genuine impact on the parent, and of being repelled or rebuffed when an independent opinion or aspiration is expressed. The child then grows up feeling not let in, like an outsider even though the family ethos demands and proclaims a high degree of loyalty and obligation. This form of parental rigidity and dogmatic certainty sets up particular dynamics of shame and guilt in the child- these dynamics have been observed in a number of cases, usually with more flagrant psychopathology involving both parent and child than in this case.

Feeling that one's opinions have to reflect the parent's or else will be met with scorn triggers an immediate shame reaction. The person feels weakened and vulnerable to humiliation, as Carl did when he would talk about his fantasies of entrepreneurial success

and then be criticized and derogated. Compounding the shame is the sense of being the outsider, both bound to the family and and a foreigner within it. This is especially painful when the child is constantly compared with another sibling who accepts the role of the cherished insider, as with Carl's brother. Since shame is such an intolerable, weakening emotion, it is easily transformed into different, less immediately frightening states. (Lewis, 1971; Morrison, 1989; Scheff, 1999; Lansky, 1992) The most frequently noted transformation is into chronic narcissistic rage (Kohut, 1972), a state in which Carl often found himself both when relating to his parents, and then revived in different work situation when people reminded him of either his mother or brother.

Within his family, shame also could be subtly, invisibly, transformed into guilt, a process that I think is fairly common. First Carl was hit with an intolerable sense of humiliating shame when his point of view was negated and ridiculed. He was also caught off guard by the criticism, shocked and surprised. When he accepts the attribution that his point of view was wrong, it is easy for shame to slide into guilt, a more elaborated verbally mediated experience of being bad.

By inducing guilt, a parent binds the child to him or her, and disrupts the child's attempt to individuate. He begins to feel that he has violated the parent's values, and that his differences with them are not warranted. He then feels impelled to go along with his parent expectations out of the conviction that they know what is right. Carl followed this pattern at key points in his adult development when he complied with parental expectations to shift his professional path and go graduate school, and when he submitted to their disapproval of his girlfriends by losing interest in them.

This type of guilt is typically induced by a dominant parent, whose criticism of the child makes the child feel simultaneously humiliated (global shame) and fundamentally incorrect (moral guilt). Fearing being wrong, the separating child or adult then doubts one's own ability to lead one's own life, which results in self-doubt and separation anxiety. This use of induced guilt and separation anxiety to bind the child to the parent was seen as a key dynamic in the aetiology of psychopathology by Bowlby (1980), who did not address the shame side of the dynamic.

This form of guilt from which Carl suffers is termed *obligation guilt* to distinguish it from a prototype or ideal type from the often discussed, frequently observed dynamics of separation guilt and survivor guilt. (Modell, 1984; Weiss and Sampson, 1986). In both separation guilt and survivor guilt, the child suffers from the sense that his or her development directly injures family members, or comes at their expense. Along with this guilt comes a crippling sense of omnipotent overresponsibility for the welfare of others. Guilt over potential harm to others becomes the cross the person bears throughout life, and can lead to intractable depressions, masochistic behaviors, and certain types of negative therapeutic reactions where the person feels he or she doesn't deserve to improve in treatment, when others are so much worse off. The person often feels compelled to make amends for imagined wrong doings, and reparative effects may be either compulsive and draining or may be genuinely reparative for both the self and others.

In obligation guilt, the guilty person is not persecuted by imagined wrongdoing that has damaged a loved caretaker or sibling. The other person, as with Carl's mother, is immune to criticism, and imperturbable in relation to the child's emotional appeals. The child may find the parent at times withdraw or be hurt, but the compelling image is that the parent is self-

enclosed, untouchable. The child's guilt has to do partially with disappointing the parent, but this leads to an anxiety-laden perception that he or she has broken ranks with the family myth by holding different opinions and values, and has potentially made a terrible mistake. In Carl's case this guilty and anxiety-laden sense of wrongdoing does not generate reparative efforts, but instead fosters endless obsessional doubting and worrying, a frightening and longer lasting permanent affect state. The worrying involves constant doubting and self-questioning of one's own judgement and competence, wondering if one has the capacity to make autonomous decisions, different from one's dictated by the omnipotent self-certain parent, without disastrous consequences. This constant worrying erodes the person's self-confidence to the extent of threatening one's sense of reality [in sense discussed by Shane, Shane and Gales, 1997].

This weakened sense of reality is dramatically manifested in the obsessional doubt that Carl shows at ends of sessions, when he has to reassure himself of what we have discussed. As his doubts, based on internalized criticisms, undermine his capacity to hold himself and his relationship to me as a new other in a positive, confident light. A cycle of shame and guilt arises where loyalty and obligation guilt weaken the self through obsessional doubt and anxiety. A person who is then riddled with insecurity is existing at that moment in a shame state of self-doubt and painful lack of self confidence and initiative. In that condition, the person is particularly susceptible to the caretaker's induction of further guilt and submissive compliance.

These same dynamics can be seen more starkly and brutally in abusive situations, where the mistreated child develops a severe sense of wrongdoing from being first overwhelmed by a loved and feared parent, and then, in a weakened, shocked state prey to hateful parental

accusations and attributions which also bind the child further to the parent. Similar dynamics seem to take place as well in cult groups, where the followers are systematically weakened, shocked, which leads to further idealization and dependence on the leader. As Kohut spoke of “complex emotions”, shame and guilt work together in a back and forth manner, together forming a complex emotional field.

Looking at my way of engaging with Carl, I am struck by the essential inseparable nature of interpretation, support and new experience - another complex mixture. Interpretation of his guilt, shame and wounded anger, was necessary in facilitating his disentanglement from his mother. Confrontation and interpretation of his interpersonal style of forcing his opinions and needs on his wife, and their roots in his mother's interactions with him broke through his repetitive attempts to dominate and control her, and he could then relate to her more openly and intimately. These interpretations while necessary were not assimilable by Carl, until I made a deliberate decision to relate to him in a more direct, and self-disclosing manner.

When I started to share my feelings and opinions frankly, though in a tactful, delimited way, he palpably relaxed and was eager to listen to and work with my ideas. I believe that my open, and self-disclosing approach exposed my own vulnerability which lessened his fears of being shamed and humiliated by me (see Morrison, 1994), and broke the dreaded cycle of enmeshment with an omnipotently posturing other (Patricia Rosbrow, personal communication).

My decision to to openly talk about aspects of my life and my opinions with Carl was based on the specifics of Carl's life history and more so in his difficulties in engaging open and productively in treatment. Plus he actually he asked me to do so, which prompted my

thinking through the wisdom of following his advice. It is not a stance I advocate or take with all patients; other patients would find this type of self-disclosure uninteresting, diverting, or a product of my needs. Carl was starved for what Shane, Shane, and Gales(1997) describe as the human need for self with interpersonal sharing other. His mother could be brutally direct with her feelings and opinions, but without consideration for his point of view or the impact of her behavior on him. What was missing for him was an experience of reciprocal, mutual sharing of experiences, with an effort to think about the other's point of view. He had the potential for this type of intimacy with his wife, but he had foreclosed this intimacy out of fear of being dominated, and because of loyalty conflicts with his mother. Once he was able to feel understood, included, and reciprocally involved with me, he was able to establish a more open and trusting connection with his wife, who fortunately immediately responded positively to his change in attitude.

Out of fear of submission, Carl developed, in Bowlby's terms, an attachment model based on compulsive self-reliance, wherein he took care of himself and mistrusted being influenced by others needs and views. This model alternated with another model in which he felt indecisive, doubt ridden and dependent on his parents' opinions and approval. (For a discussion of the concept of conflicting attachment models see Bowlby,1980 and Rosbrow,1993). Bowlby's notion of two competing attachment models offers a different, complementary view on the phenomena elucidated by Kohut in his concept of the vertical split where the person oscillates between grandiosity and feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. Kohut's concept captures the phenomenology of the fluctuations in mood and self-esteem of the person's inner world. Bowlby's concept takes into consideration a broad view of the intersubjective context of self-states and of the conflicting pictures of self with

other which underly different states. In treatment, we work to build together a new model of attachment, characterized by neither the need to dominate nor the abject submission of the self to the other.

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Correspondence to:

Thomas Rosbrow, Ph.D.

2001 Union St. #630

San Francisco CA 94941

email: rosbrow@gmail.com

