

Psychodynamic Perspective

EXAMPLES OF FREUD'S CASE STUDIES

ANNA O

- Anna O (real name Bertha Pappenheim) was not actually Freud's patient, she was a patient of Freud's older friend Josef Breuer. However, Anna O can still claim the distinction of being the founding patient of psychoanalysis because Freud developed the first stages of his theory based on her case. It is, therefore, worth knowing a few details of her case.
- At the time of her illness, Anna was 21 years old and until the illness struck she had been healthy and intelligent and had shown no signs of neurosis¹. However, her feelings had always been exaggerated and she could be moody and she day-dreamed a great deal. Her illness fell into several phases:
 1. Latent incubation - the early signs of her illness began when her father fell ill and she had to nurse him. Gradually her illness became so bad that she could no longer nurse her father. The main symptom at this stage was a severe cough.
 2. Manifest illness - Breuer described this as a "psychosis of a peculiar kind" where she had some paralysis of the right arm and leg, a squint, severe disturbances of vision. She began to hallucinate and was abusive, threw things at people and accuse others of doing things to her. Later in the course of her illness she began to speak only in English (she was a native German speaker) but could still understand German!
 3. After her Father's death - sleepwalking added to the other symptoms and she could no longer understand German and began to refuse food.

¹ Neurosis often begins as a response to a stressor and is usually characterised by a generalised anxiety: the person is irritable, jumpy, finds it difficult to concentrate and make decisions, has trouble sleeping and may experience a whole range of physical symptoms. There is a form of neurosis (that Freud called hysteria) where the person experiences physical symptoms for which there is no detectable physical or bodily cause.

- Freud and Breuer suggested that her symptoms were a result of a number of events that were buried in her unconscious and were looking for some external expression.
- Her symptoms lasted about a year and a half and only went very gradually. They went, according to Freud and Breuer, because she was subjected to a "talking cure" where each symptom was taken in turn, from first to last and discussed with her to try to find the origins and the reasons. According to Freud & Breuer "each symptom disappeared after she had described its first occurrence. In this way too, the whole illness was brought to a close". In fact, it should be noted that even after her so-called "talking cure" Anna O had to spend time in a sanatorium, was addicted to morphine and still experienced loss of her German language. However, eventually she became a prominent social worker and energetic leader in Jewish feminist causes.

If you were asked to evaluate Freud & Breuer's interpretation, methods and cure of this case, what comments would you make?

DORA

Dora (real name Ida Bauer) was the first of Freud's major case histories (some others are Little Hans, Rat Man, Wolf Man). In 1900, when she was 18, she went into analysis with Freud. The analysis lasted 11 weeks and Freud published the case history in 1905. Dora's father was a rich, highly intelligent man and Dora was very "tenderly attached" to him and looked down on her mother whom she despised. It was Dora's father who first came to Freud for medical treatment for himself (remember, Freud was a medical doctor by training). It was because of his contact with Freud that he referred Dora to Freud for treatment. In his written case study of Dora, Freud gives many biographical details about her family and interprets many seemingly "normal" family relationships and incidences in psychoanalytical terms. Note, this is all interpretation based simply on Freud's ideas.

Dora came to Freud for treatment because she developed hysteria. She became depressed, suicidal, frequently lost consciousness, had attacks of amnesia and suffered migraines. Freud claimed to have no difficulty tracing the cause of these problems which, he said, were the result of sexual abuse Dora had suffered at the hands of a family friend. Freud claims that this

abuse "seems to provide ... the psychological trauma which Breuer and I declared long ago to be the indispensable prerequisite for the production of a hysterical disorder" (1909)

There were many other complications to the case which are interesting, but not strictly necessary for you to get the overall picture of Freud's case studies: refer to "The Freud Reader" edited by Peter Gay, if you want to know more! Freud psychoanalysed Dora, mainly using the dream interpretation technique. One thing that he claimed to have worked out from this was that part of Dora's problem was guilt about masturbation in childhood and that some of her hysterical symptoms were due to abstinence from masturbating. He did manage to get Dora to a stage where her symptoms reduced and claimed this was because many unconscious motivations had been brought into conscious awareness.

Freud used dream interpretation as a major part of his treatment of Dora. Do you think there are any problems with using this kind of analysis?

LITTLE HANS

This was a case study published in 1909 of a five year old boy who had a phobia of horses. As a result of this, Little Hans refused to go out in the street in case he came across a horse. He expressed a fear that a horse would come into the house and bite him and that this was his punishment for wishing that the horse would lay down and die. Freud analysed the experiences that the boy had had, as told to him by the boy's father, and came to the conclusion that the fear of horses was an ego defence mechanism. The boy had displaced fear that he actually felt of his father. He had an unconscious wish that his father would go away (or die) because he regarded his father as a competitor for his mother's love. Freud suggests that Hans' feelings towards his mother were "the foreshadowings of his budding sexual wishes". Freud is claiming, therefore, that the boy was experiencing the Oedipus complex and had displaced these feelings of animosity towards his father on to a horse! Freud advised Little Hans' father to reassure him and that did the trick.

There is at least one obvious problem with the way the information for this case study was gathered, can you figure out what it is?

RAT MAN

Ernst Lanzer was a lawyer in his late 20s who had an obsessional neurosis that had dated back to his childhood but that had become much worse in late 1907. He had many fears, for example that something bad was going to happen to a young lady of whom he was very fond and he had odd compulsions, for example he felt he wanted to cut his throat with a razor. He was tormented with fears that his father would die, even though his father was already dead and had been for some years. His chief fear though concerned a story that someone had told him. The story was about a punishment that was given to criminals in the Orient: a pot is turned upside down on the buttocks of the criminal and rats in the pot then bore their way into the criminal's anus. He was terrified that this might happen to him and became obsessed about rats. Hence "Rat Man".

Freud traced his neurosis back to his childhood when Rat Man had been allowed to indulge in sexual foreplay with his governess and he feared that his father would find out and he would be punished. He therefore associated sexual pleasure with fear of punishment and hostility towards his father and he felt that he should be punished for all his feelings towards his lady friend. This made his hostility towards his father surface and he feared something bad would befall his father. So, he really fears punishment for himself for his sexual feelings but reverses this (displacement) and fears punishment for those close to him. Neat explanation! Rat Man's analysis lasted 11 months and his neurosis was completely cleared.

Can you think of any criticisms of Freud's explanation of Rat Man's neurosis?

WOLF MAN

This case has been called the most elaborate of all Freud's case histories. Wolf Man was a 23 year old Russian aristocrat called Sergei Pankeieff, who first came to consult Freud in 1910 because he was close to serious mental illness. He was dependent on his personal attendants and could do almost nothing for himself. Freud claimed to have traced all Wolf Man's problems back to a childhood neurosis. He focused on a dream: Wolf Man dreamt that he was lying in his bed in front of which was a window looking out on to a walnut tree. The window opened and there were six white wolves with long tails sitting silently and still in the walnut tree. This sight terrified him. He woke up screaming. He was around four years old the first time he had

the dream and he had always connected it with fear he had felt for a picture of a wolf in a book of fairy tales; Freud had different ideas about where the fear came from!

First of all, he said that the fact that the wolves had long tails represented compensation for a fear of castration that Wolf Man had as a young boy. The symbol of the wolf, according to Freud, represented the boy's father and he had a very interesting interpretation of the stillness of the wolves: he suggested it was actually a representation of the opposite, of violent motion. So, he wanted to know if Wolf Man had, as a boy, ever woken up and seen his father in violent motion in a way that had terrified him. It turned out that he had: when he was around two years old he had woken up late one afternoon and had seen his parents having sexual intercourse. The violence of the act had terrified him and he claimed that he knew its significance. From then on he was terrified of wolves. Freud provides a complex analysis of Wolf Man's neuroses; again, if you are interested in finding out more, refer to "The Freud Reader" by Peter Gay. Freud claimed to eventually have cured Wolf Man (through psychoanalytic techniques) but Wolf Man himself, many years later, claimed he was never cured.

Freud's interpretation of this case history relies on the infantile memory of Wolf Man. Can you think of any problems with this?