

## DEVELOPING PATIENT AWARENESS OF PERSONAL COMPLEXES

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*Статията предлага кратко описание на патологичните комплекси и на някои конфликти, които могат да възникнат вследствие от тях. Представена е също и методиката „Измерител на осъзнаването на комплексите“ (“Complex Awareness Measure”). Методиката може да се използва от терапевтите и на двете равнища – индивидуална и семейна терапия, с цел развиването на осъзнаване от страна на пациентите, как техните собствени комплекси оперират. Това осъзнаване улеснява рационалното разрешаване на конфликтите, произтекли от комплексите, вместо тяхното несъзнателно отреагиране. Предоставени са и някои напътствия, как да се използва цитираният инструментариум в клиничната практика.*

Jung believed that all human experience is organized into patterns called complexes that are composed of memories, physical sensations, images, ideas and behaviors and held together by an affective theme (Jung, C. W. 2, 1910, 1981, 321-322). When complexes are pathological they interfere with normal adaptation and create conflict in relationships. A pathological complex is an unconscious pattern of behavioral reactivity in relationships that results from an internal structure of rigidified memories, physical sensations, images, ideas, and meaning that cannot be verbally expressed. The complex is held together by a negative affective theme. The following fictional, clinical vignette is one example of a pathological complex and how it functions in relationships.

A man in the early phases of therapy reported a childhood nightmare in which his foot was caught under a railroad tie while a train was coming toward him. At the very last possible moment, he wiggled out of his shoe and barely missed being killed by the oncoming train. He remembered awakening curled up in a ball. He dismissed his nightmare as “one of those silly things kids dream about.”

As the man began to become aware of his pathological complex and how it functioned in his significant relationships he began to discover that he had moved from job to job and marriage to marriage feeling victimized, misunder-

stood, and unable to express or define himself when he found himself in situations that required him to be assertive or speak his own truth. When he experienced someone as an authority he felt terrified and withdrew.

In broad-brush strokes, this man's complex would sound something like this: "When people in my life ask me to define myself I experience something like a train coming toward me. I feel as if I am stuck and trapped. I have a sense of hollowness in the pit of my stomach and I break out into a cold sweat. I feel as if I am going to be annihilated and so I wriggle out of the situation (my shoe) and slither away from that person so that I do not die." This man's nightmare is a powerful description of a pathological complex and the way it operates in relationships to create conflict.

Why would this man have this particular type of complex? After a careful exploration of his history from childhood to the present time we uncovered strong prohibitions against his defining himself outside of the authority of his parents. Avoiding any confrontation became a way for him to survive in his family. His experiences of authority were internalized as train-like and instead of developing a sense of his own inner authority and defining himself in significant relationships he wriggled away from those he perceived as authorities. When life required him to stand firm, he could not. The anxiety and terror-laden feeling tone of the complex was so powerful and so embedded in his psyche that he regressed into his childhood nightmare when a perceived authority requested his opinion, commented on him, or evaluated him. As he became more aware of the operations of his pathological complex he was able to interrupt and contain his reactive behavior, gradually face and integrate the debilitating fear associated with the complex and define himself in relationships. This process could not have occurred for him without the development of his observing ego.

The observing ego is a term developed by Freud in 1940. He described a "split in the ego" that allowed the ego to observe itself through reality testing and perception: "It is the self-observing function that helps to organize and synthesize the experiences of therapy" (Scialli 1982, 388–89).

The Complex Awareness Measure presented below is meant to facilitate the development of an observing ego in patients by gradually revealing the underlying structures of the pathological complex. Clinicians can utilize the measure in the following ways:

1) Questions 1 through 18 can be included with the other questions the clinician asks when he or she is taking the patient's history.

2) If the clinician decides to administer the entire measure it is important that this be done in several steps:

a) When the patient feels protected, empowered and safe enough with the clinician to contain the painful affect located within the pathological complex he or she is ready to take the measure

b) Educate the patient about complexes in general by defining them as patterns of reactivity related to the presenting problem.

c) Explain to the patient that taking the measure will stimulate his or her complexes and that this is a desirable outcome that will increase his or her awareness how his or her complexes operate.