

„IT‘S A CURSE“

**SUBJECTIVE THEORIES OF A FAMILY CURSE IN THE
TREATMENT OF A 10 YEAR OLD BOY**

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1. THERAPY OF THE CHILD

- „Sam“: 10 year old boy, no siblings
- Anxiety and insecurity, self-doubt, also aggressive breakthroughs
- Strange behavior
- Past diagnostic investigation on autism with no clear diagnosis
- In school: victimization, being ashamed by others
- Both parents freelance artists

1. THERAPY OF THE CHILD

- Rapidly becoming obvious issues of shame and extreme feelings of guilt
- In many ways staged in role playing during treatment sessions
- More and more obvious parallels to childhood experiences of the father

2. FATHER'S CURSE STORY

- Occasion: my usage of a metaphor: „Almost as if you were cursed.“
- „I haven't ever told anybody, but that's my feelings for a long time now.“
- Father: youngest child of 3 sons
- Mr O.'s father rejected him
- Mr O.'s grandmother (paternal) had always been against the marriage, had „practiced black magic“, collaborated with Nazis
- GM had told Mr O.'s M to abort pregnancy with him. Had cursed the marriage of his father and mother

2. FATHER'S CURSE STORY

- Most of life's experience under the bad sign of the curse
- School: experienced Mobbing by teachers
- Recognition of father's talent for drawing had not aroused interest but further rejection and mobbing instead
- Attempts on getting psychotherapy had led to further staged experiences of rejection. „That's the curse.“
- Deserved success had always been denied to the father

3. AMPLIFICATION OF „CURSE“

- Encyclopedia Britannica: Curse as a sub-form of „spell“, a sequence of words, uttered with magical intent
- A form of malevolent magic
- In Hoodoo also crossing, hex or jinx. Apart from malevolent prayers often includes rituals and symbolic actions
- Curses can disrupt different areas of life, e. g. luck, financial success, health, love life, sexuality and fertility

3. AMPLIFICATION OF „CURSE“

- Especially powerful are notions of the „generational curse“
- In many cultures: rituals designed to remove or break curses
- people who know how to perform them.
- For example:
 - Bathing rituals for cleaning away the curse
 - Actions like rolling raw egg on the body to absorb it
 - Prayers, symbolic actions and imaginations to break it

3. AMPLIFICATION OF CURSE

- Many elements of curses found in father's narration
- Notion of a transgenerational curse, involving GGM > GM/GF > father > son
- Notions of authorship (GGM) and fear of the malevolent powers of Mr O.'s GM early in his childhood
- Memories of sentences which were experienced as curses, e.g. „The world wouldn't have had any need for you.“ / „You shouldn't have been born.“
- Experience of being „damaged“ in self-efficacy, in being able to be lucky and in financial and love issues
- Sensation of being powerless, worthless and of being expelled from the community (of the not-cursed people)

4. PSYCHODYNAMIC HYPOTHESES

- Father and son: extreme sense of shame
- Shame and sense of primary guilt (Neumann)
- Fission of the father's parental representations
- Mr O.'s GM as perpetrator introject
- Expectations of self-inefficacy and paranoid attitudes
- Lead to reenactments of experiences of being rejected and to projection/projective identification
- In hypnotic terms: Fear inducing behavior of Mr O.'s GM → increased suggestibility → implanting feelings of worthlessness

5. CONCLUSION

- Active enquiring about religious or spiritual beliefs of patients/families may be important
- Might need cultivation of openness toward religious beliefs/experiences
- could be of practical importance and be helpful to improve understanding of the disorder (e. g. psychodynamic)
- Could religious/magical and psychological descriptions be two different languages for the same phenomenon?

5. CONCLUSION

- But: very different practical implications
- Religious/magical practice: curse-breaking actions, rituals mostly done ON the cursed victim → little to no reference to strengthening self efficacy
- Psychotherapy: treatment done WITH and BY the patient. Development and strengthening of self efficacy

Castle metaphor:

- Magical beliefs: fighting the enemy at the gates
- Psychological theories: securing the gate, building strong boundaries

5. CONCLUSION

- Helpful to supplement treatments with religious/spiritual practice, given a religious/spiritual context?
- Under which circumstances?
- Keeping up Separation between spiritual and psychotherapeutic practice might be important → transference problems
- scientific experimentation and efficacy trials might be helpful
- Also inter-disciplinary cooperation (religious studies psychotherapy, psychology, etc. ...)