



## CLINICAL STUDY DAYS 2 CLINICAL CASE

### *The case of J*

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**Abstract:** The analytic work with children starts with the imaginary signifiers found in their legends to the re-organization of a symbolic field where she finds an identity for herself in the Other. From "alone-miserable" the jouissance found in the family's discourse to "gifted-girl" at school.

**Key words:** jouissance; signifiers: alone-miserable.

**Resumen:** El trabajo analítico con niños comienza con los significantes imaginarios encontrados en sus mitos o leyendas hacia una reorganización en el campo simbólico, donde ella encuentra su propia identidad en el marco del Otro. Desde "sola-miserable" del goce encontrado en el discurso familiar hacia "niña-avanzada" en la escuela.

**Palabras claves:** goce; significantes: única-miserable.

She is an eight year old girl from an old couple who came from South America. She is the *only child* from this marriage and also the *only one* to her father, something he comments with sorrow, as she does not have anyone to play with. These signifiers are also used constantly by J as a way to signify herself: *alone* and *only one*.

When the father came to US, he left the mother *alone* because she was far along in her pregnancy; he then returned to take her with him when J was already nine months old. The mother has one son from a different father who stayed in South America and only one sister, who had just moved to the States and died accidentally at the age of only 21 years. The maternal grandmother finds that J has many traits of her dead aunt.

Citing Lacan at the Conference at Ginebra in 1975: "a subject is *spoken* by something over which he has no control". "This will be the first nucleus where his symptoms will come from".

The reason for the parents' consultation with the analyst was the school's complaints about J's violence that puts her and others at risk. According to the father, the teachers frequently harassed them with reports over J's behaviors, as if she was the only one causing trouble. The truth is that neither the teacher nor the mother could control her when she was angry, generally when there was something she could not do well in mathematics or when she did not win a prize like in sport competitions. One last incident, when J drew a heart on the wall and wrote *only* her name inside, was considered an act of vandalism and graffiti by the school. This school incident upset the father even more. J justified her doing it because her male classmate since Kindergarten did not want to be her friend anymore: she says she "was *left alone* again".

When I started working with J, she complained about the *name calling* at school which leaves her feeling *angry* and *alone*. She mentioned being called "nerd" because she wears glasses. She had various surgeries to correct her strabismus. The name "crooked" related to the shape of her teeth, which required a premature orthodontic treatment. The other children also generally call her "disgusting". All these comments trigger her to demand and act out towards others, seeking a positive response, that did not come and resulting in the disregard of other pluses that she has achieved.

She realizes she is not a "popular" girl and complains to the others about her "miserable" life. The way she defends herself is by acting offensively, in angry outbursts, acting to be seen, what she resumes as "get public" in her imaginary stories. These incidents require the intervention of any authority figure: mother, father, teacher, and/or principal in order to remove her from the situation. She complains again that at the end of the school year during the awards ceremony, the teachers make her feel like she did not do anything, a way that makes her say that "she does not exist" for them. The analyst underlines the difference between "not doing" enough that she is able to verbalize and "doing too much" when angry, that she is still not aware of.

In the beginning, and motivated by the analyst's offerings at the playroom, she chose to play with puppets and sand tray miniatures. I followed J's pleasure for inventing tragic stories called "legends": she explains that these are not resolvable and

you never know if they are real. These stories tell about children who are left *alone*, a dead mother and the need for someone to help them. In that discourse, she mentions the forest where the animals turned wild, the poison, the blood and the death's presence.

In a story, she describes a bird with her babies and the presence of a flying dinosaur. She says she would like to be like him, the biggest, the king, and although he ends up eating the bird and leaving the babies *alone*, she rapidly clarifies that someone will come to help.

She also talks about a monster that is "disgusting" but immediately, she includes herself by saying she is not a "bully", a defense originated in J's identification with the main character and its mean behaviors. She explains that there is also a fox in the story, and he is confused though is intelligent, and although he does not know how to swim, he finds somebody who helps him. At the end of the session, she picked a book about how to handle bullies and name calling, a way to continue with the session's theme.

She ends up these stories with the return back home, but only after the character gets noticed (her expression is get public).

There is a frequent look for a safe place to live in the US and not at the forest, which is a reference to her country of origin. At the forest is where mothers and young children are at risk to die, and the only hope for a miracle to happen is to hide them by burying them alive so they could survive. During these stories we can see her continuous ambivalence between being left alone at risk or to take the risk under her arms (or wings) by changing into a big bird, the bully.

From the symptom's perspective, J as she describes about the fox, is inhibited to perform especially in math, sports, and social relations. Her poor tolerance facing frustration makes her act confused and clumsy resulting in angry outbursts and feeling guilty later on.

She has trouble controlling her urgency while working on trying to make something positive happen. For her, on the spur of the moment, everything turns into an absolute present, and when she is not able to finish a product, like building something (e.g. with legos), she finds no other option than to destroy the other's work.

The signifier *only one*, with which she identifies, comes handy at this time; it is used to find that special chance she describes as "my own creation", that niche where

she could be her own, without names from others. A fantasy she intends to use as a defense but with negative consequences, it does not save her from her frequent frustrations and provokes the being left alone by the other in a deadly repetition she complains about.

The analyst will place her interventions at these moments, taking in the role (J mentions in the stories) as the one who accompanies her, to help her build her missing skills (like spending the necessary time to read the instructions for a game or to build from scratch her own inventions to serve her purpose in playing a character's scene).

At other times, once the transference is well-established, the analyst will cut off the action, a way to separate it into two parts: from a previous situation to the following consequence, trying to open a lapse in between that could bring awareness into place.

In her fantasy, J does not measure herself by the rule of castration, like the flying dinosaur, she wants to be the exception; the father's discourse offers her the path by being that special *only one*.

I proposed a game to her. Bringing the magnetic letters of the alphabet to a board, I started forming *her name*, with an X she complained about in US, and showing how *she decided to take away the x*, by replacing it with a J, with which she identifies with, from her origins. Then I said I want to do same as her with another word lonely and I asked to help me to do the same by cutting the word in two parts, and by taking the first L out of the board, we will only do with the *rest (one-ly)* two words: *one* and *only*. Meaning she is *the special one*. The only one who makes these interesting legends. The only one who takes the puppets out of my office, to ride the car, visit her house and meet her family and toys, the one who reads the books from my place and comes back with new stories, the one admitted to a unique program in school, for the Gifted.

The sexual subject comes about. She brings a dream she qualifies as a nightmare, she is only 3 years old and two gangs are coming to punish her for having touched something with her hands.

A man and a woman asked her to find a jewel in the toilet of a building she finds familiar. She goes only with her father; her mom is busy washing clothes. She mentions being scared with hands, but she is happy because nothing happened. The analyst asks why the punishment, she replies was only for touching a leaf. The repression is shown by the insignificance of her answer. Around that time, the mother

reports to me an incident with J at the school's bathroom, where she and another girl were accused of "touching".

As always at the end of a session, she chooses something to take with her until the next one. This time, she picks a book about body's changes in puberty.<sup>1</sup>

The following session J uses her new knowledge over her own body toward a future position as a woman. In her comments, is possible to observe the passage from the fantasy of the *only one*, the girl she is for her father, to the fantasy of finding love with someone else.

As it happened in this case, working with children requires also certain interventions with parents and school, building a bridge of communication and the possibility of pointing out certain peculiarities in each child, recovering the individuality over the label.

The child that the school calls "violent", many times can not figure out how to avoid this label and segregation that her actions bring. From the school's side, the difficulty arises out of the blind respect for the command "rules for all" and "zero tolerance". From the immigrant parents, the trouble sometimes increases from their defense of their old culture via the opposition.

The bridge that the analyst offers (allowing the alternative of another discourse) could bring new options that help the child find her own place in this struggle to survive at the school scene.

In this case, J found a new niche for herself at school, since she became an advantaged student in Language; she now belongs to a unique program called the Gifted. Consequently, her impulsive incidents have dropped both in frequency and in intensity.

Regarding the parents, the meetings with them help with the change in J's subjective position, especially in relation to the chain of signifiers: *alone-only one-miserable*, breaking the cycle in which the three of them placed themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Mayle, P. *What's happening to me?* New Jersey: Ed. Lyle Stuart, 1975.