

**Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS):
Psychodynamic and Psycho-
therapeutic Aspects.
— A Case Study —**

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Symptoms and Diagnosis

Complaints/symptoms:

- He said he was suffering from extreme, continuous fatigue and exhaustion, and stated that he had no energy, and hardly any fun in life;
- He had severe problems concentrating, which was accompanied by awareness deficits and decreased memory capability;
- He felt overwhelmed by everything, every minor detail of everyday life: tying his shoelaces or looking for something in an unfamiliar store were difficult tasks to accomplish;

Symptoms and Diagnosis

- He did not sense his feelings and needs, or only barely sensed them;
- He perceived everything around him as if in a haze

“I do 20% of things - and everything else just simply happens. I do not stand behind what I do, regardless of what it is. Everything is utterly remote. When I completed my university studies with a good academic performance, I wasn't a part of that.”

Symptoms and Diagnosis

“I am too tired to be depressed.”

Definition:

“CFS, which is nearly identical to neurasthenia in its diagnosis, is defined as severe and long-lasting exhaustion for which no physical cause can be found and which cannot be cured in any significant way by rest or relaxation. Incidental criteria [...] are a series of further symptoms, such as, for example, the inability to concentrate and decreased memory capability, swollen lymph nodes, and muscle pain.”

(Henningesen et al., 2002)

Psychodynamic Genesis

- Mr. D. suffers from a “mentalizing disorder” (P. Fonagy, 2004), which means he is unable to give *meaning* and *importance* to his own actions and those of other people on the basis of intentional mental states and processes (such as feelings, desires, needs, and convictions).
- The emotional-motivational basis of a personality, which dynamizes and energizes any healthy person, was almost entirely lacking.

Ego functions

■ Aggression

Highly deficient aggression

This is expressed in Mr. D. by his lack of needs, interests, and objectives, in his passive seclusion from people and objects, and in his avoidance of competitive situations and conflicts.

■ Ego demarcation

Highly destructive (=rigid) demarcation

He often tries to do everything himself to ensure that he is left alone and does not have to talk to anyone – and out of an exaggerated perfectionism compounded by a highly deficient demarcation between himself and the outside world -

“I am always ready to do good, and so I say yes before I have thought it over”.

Ego functions

■ Anxiety

low constructive anxiety; a deficient anxiety predominates, in other words the fear of fear itself – i.e. the fear of the identity anxiety that any person who lives a creative and active life will encounter on a very existential level over and over again.

■ Narcissism

low constructive narcissism, increased deficient narcissism. His low sense of self-esteem constantly makes Mr. D. dependent on external narcissistic influx; on the other hand, his isolation and his inability to enter into social contact prohibit him from accepting social energy.

Ego functions

- **Sexuality**

within the standard range. Sexuality represents a liberated area for Mr. D. in which he can sense himself and is able to intensively experience physical intimacy and warmth. At the same time, sexuality can assume an addictive-symbiotic character for him (this is the way the patient himself has described it), and must overcompensate for all the other things he feels are lacking in his life.

Discussion

What was helpful for Mr. D.'s development during the psychotherapeutic process?

- Empathetic understanding of how the patient became who he is, and of his being the way he is. This strengthens the therapeutic alliance and gives the patient a sense of relief.
- Empathetic affect mirroring in order to promote the differentiated self-perception of the patient's feelings.
- Showing interest in him, for what he does, also his work. He came into closer contact with a project and could identify more strongly with it, which gave him a greater sense of presence and he became awake.

Discussion

- Having interests, objectives, an identity of one's own will motivate anyone, it will give them energy, a sense of presence and will make them come awake!
- “Wonderful Week” : He realized that he was not as dependent and passive as he had always assumed to be.
- The progress he had made, but forgotten, was recalled: “memory talk” so as his memory could develop.
- Patience, patience, patience