
ANALYTICAL AUTOGENIC TRAINING

an illustrative case history

by

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English translation by Catherine Frances Russell.

I was telephoned by a woman I shall call R.B. who said she had a serious problem that could ruin her career. I made the appointment.

When she turned up I was unable to distinguish the sex of the person in front of me. I was confronted by an individual not too tall, with dark crew cut hair, dark complexion and sharp, chiselled features. She was dressed in heavy trousers, shirt with scarf knotted at the neck and masculine, tweedy jacket. Her voice was harsh.

She told me that for years she had been the only woman working on a road construction project with more than two hundred men. For several months now she had had this strange but increasingly serious and continual problem of blushing whenever any one of them spoke to her. The fear of this happening had become so intolerable (a real obsession) that if anyone joked about it or tried to play it down to console her, she would burst into tears. She was thirty years old and secretary to the site manager.

I thought there must be a close correlation between the way in which she saw her own body, so hidden under those masculine clothes, and the psychic discomfort which had unleashed her distressing symptom and I considered analytical autogenous training* the best way to lead to her becoming aware of her sexual identity and thereby to the alleviation of the symptom.

From the fourth session onwards, R.B. was able to reach good depths of relaxation, and the blushing was triggered during the induction by dealing with the way in which she saw her own body. In the meantime it emerged that her father had worked as a labourer on the same construction site for years and it was he who had procured her the job. She was extremely fond of her father with whom she said she had a "man-to-man" (sic) relationship. She was the youngest of three daughters and defined her sisters who lived at home with their mother as fragile and feminine.

* A.A.T. is a technique perfected by Michel Sapir (*La relaxation: son approche psychanalytique*) based on Shultz's basic autogenous training exercises with the insertion of modifications whereby bodily stimulation (touching of the patient by the therapist intended as proof of reality and physical messages) favours the emergence of intrapsychic dynamics.

At the twelfth session she admitted to having a practically non-existent and frustrating sex-life after years of a satisfactory sex life (her first relationship was when she was fourteen). The last relationship had however ended in frustration when she was abandoned by her partner who had promised her marriage and persuaded her to hand over all her savings to him.

At the seventeenth session she recalled a time when she was still young (nine) but had already begun to menstruate: the occasion was the arrival from abroad of a distant relative with his fourteen year old son. They were meeting for the first time. The son asked her name; she replied "Rosetta"; winking at her he murmured "I call something else "rosetta",* at which she blushed violently, red with shame. Such was my patient's embarrassment at this that she locked herself in her room until the relatives had safely departed, two days later. I told her that there had probably been seductive sexual phantoms lurking away in her unconscious. She blushed at this and became thoughtful: "It was my father who gave me this name and I have always been his Rosetta". I gave her a phrase to repeat during her A.T. exercises for the week until the next session: "I shall blush no longer; I am happy up here and stronger" (the building site was in the mountains).

The next time she came back to me she confirmed that she finally felt happier, and that the symptom was much improved. For the first time I saw her dressed in a skirt and blouse.

* *Italian slang for female genitals.*

She said she only blushed now in particular situations. On my asking which, she hesitated before replying: "Strangely enough it happens when our manager calls me or someone tells me that he is looking for me or gives me his messages". I pressed her, insisting on the "strangely enough" and she came out with quite a startling insight.

"It really all started one New Year's Eve when I organized a splendid party for the entire site crew. My boss told me how clever I was, gave me a kiss on the cheek and danced the first dance with me. It was at that moment that I suddenly became aware of being physically attracted to him, even though he was almost thirty years my senior. From then onwards the thought of him became a real obsession, and one day when he was absent from work I telephoned him with the excuse of some problem at the office and told him I was in love with him. He said that was very flattering for him, but that he was much too old for me. He said however, that I would always be his dear and precious Rosetta. His words caused me to blush violently and I had a spontaneous ejaculation almost at the same time. I wet my pants like that time with my cousin, only then I didn't understand, I thought I had unexpectedly started to menstruate or let out some wee, but it was neither one nor the other and I remained perturbed about it".

She continued, telling me that since that telephone call she no longer had any desire to make love with her present partner and that she felt frigid. I gave her a second code phrase: "loving well is easy and gay and now my blushes stay away".

Here again the results were immediately evident. She attended another seven sessions and ended the therapy, satisfied. The symptom had completely disappeared and nothing was left of her sexually ambiguous image. Her hair was now longer and she had begun to use

make-up. After a few months I received a letter from her announcing her engagement to a colleague of her own age. She was leaving the building site to open a boutique. Four months later she was to be married.

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