

Barbara is a sixteen-year-old high-school junior, brought up in a family of very strict religious traditions. Her father is in religious work, and Barbara greatly admires him, particularly for his academic and scholarly achievements. The father is a stern individual who has never shown much affection, but who has taken some pride in Barbara's excellent school marks. Barbara's social life has been extremely limited, not because of parental restrictions, but because she herself has strongly disapproved, on religious grounds, of most adolescent social activities. During her junior year she had a "nervous breakdown" which came on her very suddenly, bringing with it fears and sensations of an overwhelming sort which were very troubling to Barbara. She was unable to attend school, and was placed in the home of relatives for a time on her doctor's advice. Some months after her "break," she came to the clinic for help. During a period of about twelve weeks the psychologist had sixteen counseling contacts with Barbara in which the girl worked out many of her problems. Following this she was able to return home and again enter school successfully. The unusually complete record of these interviews has been carefully considered, and the excerpts which follow represent most of the instances in which there seemed to be clear-cut evidence of increased insight, or in which the counselor endeavored to interpret the situation in order to bring about more insight. The progress from partial and dubious insights to more complete and assured insight is very clear. The content of the interviews cannot, of course, be given in a limited space, but the more significant issues are clearly implied in these conversations in which insight is evident.

First and Second Interviews. No instances of insight noted.

Third Interview. Talking about the heavy feeling of responsibility which she has always had, Barbara says:

"All the opportunities are at my feet if I can take advantage of them. I wish to get everything out of every opportunity."

Counselor remarked, "You have to be perfect, don't you?" She replied, "Yes. People would say, 'Everyone has to have his faults.' I didn't think so. I couldn't see any reason for that. It seemed to me I could do everything just right. Maybe, (*pausing thoughtfully*) maybe some of those ideas are too high-powered for me. Is that the reason for my break?" Counselor asked what she thought, and she felt that maybe it did have something to do with it.

Fourth Interview. Barbara has been talking of the fact that she has never had anything but a brotherly interest in boys, while a girl whom she detests had come between her and one of these boys with "sweetheart stuff." The record continues:

There was a hesitation, and then she said, "Should I tell my likes and dislikes?" Counselor said, "You get further when you talk about how you feel." She said, "There is only one person I like, a boy here in L——. I missed him when we moved to D——. Maybe he likes me. I don't know. Of course, I'm not interested in getting married and I've never thought of him like that. His name is Frank. He came in last night with Jack, the other boy who is going to teach me to dance. Frank was even more like a brother to us. He used to come to our house, and my sister and I knew him very well. I liked him and I've thought a good deal about him since leaving L——."

Counselor remarked, "Maybe those feelings have something to do with your questions about dancing and about doing your hair." "Maybe they do. Yesterday in thinking about whether to have my hair cut, I thought of it as something for Frank, but then I tried to snap that out of my mind." She laughed and giggled somewhat self-consciously. "I guess I have a tinge of love. I hate to admit it. I fight it, I guess."

Later in the same interview, after some confused remarks and a long pause, she says:

"Before all this, I believed in controlling oneself, in complete mastery of my mind and feeling." Counselor discussed this, saying that what she was gradually learning was that there was no such thing as complete control of mind and feeling; that it was rather hard for her to recognize that the part she was shutting out was a part of herself. She said, "You know that motto, 'Be yourself.' I used to hear that, and I couldn't understand it. I didn't think that I wanted to be myself, or that I knew what

it meant to be yourself. I guess I have acted that way so long that I don't quite know how to be myself."

Fifth Interview. Talking about some highly ambitious intellectual plans she had discussed with one of her teachers, Barbara says:

"He calls them our heavy ideas. I call it high-powered thinking. Maybe you'll tell me that I ought to stay away from that sort of thing for a year or so." Counselor said, "Do you want me to tell you that?" "Well, I will anyway, whether you say to or not." Counselor remarked, "Good for you." Barbara went on, "I've changed so much. Why, I almost used to accuse the young people of being too 'flippy.' When I go back I'm going to go to a show once in a while, go to a movie."

Sixth Interview. Barbara, after much blocking, tells how, after one recent evening

"that brotherly relationship with Frank changed a little. He kissed me several times, and that changed things." She goes on to talk about this incident and adds, "Most of the girls run around after boys — I don't know — I have just such an unselfish feeling toward Frank. I'd do anything for him. Of course, I don't think of him for marriage, why, he isn't even eligible. I guess I think I'm in love. Still, love and marriage usually go together. I don't know. I try to figure it out mentally, but there is no mental pattern. So far as Frank being my ideal — why, of course he has good qualities, but he doesn't anywhere near measure up to my ideal. (*Pause.*) I didn't say anything about all this at first, though it is one of my most prominent feelings." Counselor said, "It isn't easy to talk about our deepest feelings, is it?"

At another point in this interview, after counselor had commended her for the progress she had been making, she said:

"I used to try to think it all out, but I couldn't do anything about it. Lately I've been doing more as I feel. I don't mean that I lose control of my emotions, but I just do more what I feel like doing. That's why I knew last time that I was going to tell you about Frank."

Later in this interview, she says that she is taking up sewing, an occupation which she had formerly scorned. Counselor remarks that she has definitely changed, adding:

"When you left home you were a little girl." Barbara re-

plied, "Do you think so? I feel younger now." Counselor said, "I think that when you left home you were a little girl who was trying to act very, very old. Now I think that you have grown up and that what you are going to do is to try to be yourself and act your age." She smiled and said, "Maybe so. You know Wednesday after the appointment here I went all over town to find a jacket just like I wanted. Back home I liked those jackets with writing on them. All the girls wore them. They had lists of their boy friends on them and all sorts of crazy things. That was the real me, I guess, that liked those jackets. Of course, I didn't get one then. I felt it wasn't dignified. I guess I had a streak of fun in me, but I didn't want to let it out. So Wednesday I decided I would get one. I had to walk all over town and nearly blistered my feet getting it. But I finally got one." She shows the counselor a plain linen jacket which she had laid over a chair when she came in. "You see, it hasn't any writing on it yet, but the next time I come in it will have. It will have lots of writing on it." She points to the collar. "Along here it will say, 'No arms allowed.'"

Seventh Interview. Barbara has been expressing her attachment to the counselor by saying that she has now decided to be a psychologist.

"Of course, there's the fact that I'm a woman. I suppose — are there any women that get anywhere in psychology?" Counselor told her there were a number of women who held leading positions, and went on to say, "You hate to think that you're a woman, don't you?" She said, "Yes, it seems I admire masculine qualities so much that I wish I could be a young man. Maybe somebody ought to set me straight and show me that I could be a fine young woman."

Later in the interview she remarked:

"About the time of my 'break,' when the doctor told me that my thoughts and all were like a man of thirty, I felt it was sort of a pat on the back. Maybe, though, I was just trying to be masculine, when all I could do was to be feminine."

Eighth Interview. At one point Barbara says that some people used to tell her that these high ambitions of hers would die out and she would "sort of settle down."

"Is that necessary? Will I have to lose my ambitions? I think I'm doing more like I feel, but if I just do the things I feel,

where will that get me? It's all so puzzling." Counselor interpreted to her that after all the progress she has been making is not just in doing what she feels, but in being willing to accept her feelings. Pointed out that formerly she had always denied to herself that she had any desire to have a good time or to be social. She had denied that she had any sex feelings or any desire for boy friends. She had denied that she wanted to look attractive or to have her hair bobbed like other girls. Now she is reaching a point where she can accept the fact that she does have all these feelings. Of course, this does not mean that she will follow all her impulses, but that she will not be afraid of herself or of the feelings which she finds herself having. Ended by saying, "A year ago you wouldn't have talked with the boy at the meeting [an incident she had described]. You wouldn't have admitted to yourself that you were interested in him or that you were attracted to him. Now you can realize it. Of course, what you will do about it will not be simply to follow your impulses, but to decide how far you want to go in following up that interest." She laughed at this and said that she had hardly dared to admit to herself the extent to which this boy had interested her. "But it is true lately that I feel I want more masculine friends." The counselor added, "And you will be willing to admit that you have both an intellectual interest in them and also an interest in them as boy friends."

Ninth Interview.

Barbara says, "You know I talked to you about children the first time I came in and said I didn't like them. I want to analyze that a little." She talks about her dislike for small children, but the fact that children seem to like her. "Maybe my dislike has been more or less forced. Maybe I just thought I'd be that way."

Tenth Interview. She talks with concern about her educational plans and the fact that she does not always get the very highest marks.

Counselor remarks, "You still have to be perfect if you start something, don't you?" She replies, "Well, I am feeling that way some. I've always tried to be the ideal girl that you read about. Older people always like me. I always do nice things for them, and young children, they're always fond of me. I guess young people are my problem." Counselor interpreted the fact that perhaps her willingness to do things for older adults and

children was partly due to her realization that she could not get along with her own group. She said, "I guess so. I guess boys don't like that missionary-minded sort of person that I was. I was just a girl full of sweet ideas. Well, you know what I mean."

Eleventh Interview. Barbara discusses her educational plans again, laying great stress on Latin, scholarly pursuits, and the like.

Counselor mentioned that this would be one type of goal. Reminded her, however, that throughout her interviews here her greatest satisfactions have come when she has chosen to do something which would make her more like other young people — her jacket, her haircut, her plans about dancing, and the like.

She sits for a moment, and then speaks more to herself than to the counselor: "Maybe I am foolish to think of those things. Other people don't appreciate them. I don't do them just to show off. Maybe that all seems so worthy, but maybe it's all cowfodder." She stops and bursts into laughter. "Where did I ever get that word! Cowfodder!"

Twelfth Interview. In the middle of the interview she laughs and says:

"You know, about the fourth time I came in I sniffled over Frank. That must have seemed awfully silly to you. Now it just seems like nothing much at all. I feel as though I'm ready to drop him when I get back to D—. I'd like to see him once more before I go, but when I go back I'm going to forget him. You know, before I was sort of a martyr to love. I guess that's what you'd call it. Now I laugh at myself. First I thought I'd never get over it. Now I think I'll find somebody else to take his place when I get back. Still I'll always have a kind of soft spot in my heart for him." Counselor encouraged her as to the way in which she had worked through this whole problem.

Thirteenth Interview.

Barbara says, "Is there any problem I'm not quite facing squarely?" Counselor says that she would know best whether there were problems she had not fully faced. "Well, it's that marriage question. I'm still kind of mixed up on it. I don't know what I want myself. I kind of want to dodge it." She goes on to discuss in quite confused fashion her mixed attitude toward children, her fear of childbirth, her fear that marriage would interfere with a career. She hesitates for a bit and then

remarks on how much she has changed. She has come across a couple of *True Story Magazines* and has really rather enjoyed them. "And then when I see someone high wide and handsome going down the street, that interests me too. I don't know myself what I want."

A moment later she remarks:

"You know, I have always liked masculine companionship, not sex so much, just the companionship of mind to mind." She hesitates and says, "Well, here's something. If I had to make a choice like I did about my hair as to whether I'd be a boy or a girl, I don't know now which I'd choose."

She talks a little about some of her experiences during her "break" and says, "Maybe because I wanted to be a boy I tried to emphasize mind. I've sort of tried to mingle——" She stops, puzzled. "I didn't like girls. I liked boys, because a boy was what I would like to be." Counselor said, "I think that you felt that boys were above girls." She replied, "Yes, mentally superior. It seemed as though they could stand much more than girls could. I wanted to dodge being a woman. I wanted to develop that intellectual side of me. I thought I was getting there — and then I broke." Counselor said, "Perhaps you're learning now that you can be feminine and mentally superior." "Well, before I was all mind and no body. I was evading that situation just as far as I possibly could. I think that had something to do with it."

Toward the end of the interview she remarks:

"In the *American Magazine* a few months ago there was some sort of a test on masculine and feminine traits. I took it and I found that on all but one of the items I gave the feminine response. It made me so mad at the time!"

Fourteenth Interview.

"That last time I came in — you know we didn't settle too much last time — yet on the bus going back I was just thinking that it meant so much to me. I think lots of little things are coming to a head now, and some time soon I'm going to spill them all to you."

Fifteenth Interview. During this interview Barbara is talking about the problems she will face when she goes back home.

"My friends are going to ask, 'How are you?' I don't like that.

I can't tell them how I feel, and if I say I'm all right, then they'll wonder why I'm not at the Young People's Society. You know, I just feel like it's a new world I'm living in, and I'm different from what I used to be. They used to ask me to pray in the Young People's Society. I don't want that saintly, pious attitude now. You know, I read the Bible for the first time in months this morning. It really seemed as though things have changed. The things I read seemed to have a new meaning for me. You know, I still aim for perfection, but it's a different sort. Before, I would read the Bible and I would find in it reasons for not dancing and not doing other things, but now it looks different to me."

About the middle of the interview Barbara says:

"You know, I've thought about that femininity thing again and I'm going to see if I can put it into words. I'm a girl. I'm going to accept it, not as fate, not in a spirit of submission, but as meant for the best. If there is a God, I think he must have meant it for the best. I can be a better woman than I can be if I try to acquire masculine desires. I can probably do a lot more good by being myself and developing my own talent rather than trying to do something different. I'm going to accept it as a challenge. I feel that I've almost lost that feeling that I wanted to be masculine. I just want to be myself. Maybe before I get through I'll really be glad I'm feminine. I'm going to learn to cook and I'm going to be a good cook and make an art out of it."

An Attempt at Analysis. It will be obvious even to the casual reader that Barbara's ways of perceiving herself have undergone a profound change during this counseling experience. If an effort is made to analyze or group these new perceptions, they seem to fall into four categories. Barbara has come to accept a more realistic view of her abilities and her ultimate achievements. She has been able to achieve an acceptance of her own inhibited social desires. She can admit her heterosexual desires. She has shifted from a complete repudiation of her feminine rôle to a rather complete acceptance of it. It helps to clarify the process through which she has gone, if the succession of self-percepts in each of these areas are listed, approximately in the girl's own terms. The reader may check the accuracy

of these self-percepts by reference to the interview material quoted.

I. Barbara's views of her goals of achievement.

Third Interview. Perhaps my previous ideals were too high-powered.

Fourth Interview. I used to want complete self-control. Now I think I want to be myself.

Fifth Interview. I'm going to relinquish my too high-powered ideals.

Eighth Interview. But it is a real loss to give up my fantastic ambitions. If I am simply myself, where will that get me?

Tenth Interview. I used to want to be a "sweet," ideal girl. Now I want to be a natural young person.

Eleventh Interview. My previous goals, too lofty and too high-powered, are "cowfodder."

II. Barbara's views of her social self.

Fifth Interview. I disliked "flippy" young people. Now I admit I have some "flippy" desires.

Sixth Interview. I used to disapprove of the girls who wore undignified and silly linen jackets. Now I admit that the real me has always wanted to do the same thing.

Tenth Interview. I want to get along with other young people.

Fifteenth Interview. I'm no longer an ultra-saintly person, afraid of my social instincts. I'm very much changed.

III. Barbara's views of her heterosexual interests.

Fourth Interview. I hate sweetheart stuff. Yet truthfully, I have a tinge of love myself.

Sixth Interview. Love and marriage go together. I want love, but not marriage. Or do I?

Eighth Interview. I am interested in boys and in having boy friends. I can admit that now.

Twelfth Interview. I realize that what I've had was puppy love. Now I look forward to other contacts which will bring love.

IV. Barbara's views regarding being a woman.

Early Interviews. I dislike children. I don't want marriage. I wish I were a man, or could act like a man.

Seventh Interview. I have hated to be a woman. Maybe someone will convince me that I should be a woman.

Eighth Interview. Perhaps I like children rather than dislike them.

Thirteenth Interview. I don't want to be a woman. Still I do. If I had my choice, I'm no longer sure. Perhaps trying to be a man caused my breakdown. I guess I am really quite feminine.

Fifteenth Interview. I am a woman. I am going to be a woman. I like the idea.

Such statements are, to be sure, a crude, but possibly an effective, way of showing the reorientation which gradually developing insight has brought about. Or the alteration may be described in more formal terms. During the period of her counseling contacts Barbara has changed from a person who feels she must be perfect, must be a man, must refrain from many social activities, a person who dislikes any "sweetheart stuff," to a person who can have comfortable goals of achievement, who desires social activities, looks forward to heterosexual contacts, and accepts her feminine rôle. Whether we describe this change in terms of changed goals, changed motivation, release of repressions, or change in self-percepts, it is obvious that the change is a highly significant fact. It is a process of sufficient dynamic potency to command our full attention.

The examples of insight which have been given thus far indicate that its meaning to the client may be described in different ways in different instances. It may mean the perception of new relationships between old facts, illustrated again in Barbara's perception of the connection between her nervous breakdown on the one hand and her ultra-lofty ideals and her desire to be a man on the other. Or it may mean the facing and acceptance of hitherto repressed attitudes and impulses. It may mean a willingness to face and recognize the rôle one has been playing. As we consider the process from the counselor's viewpoint, other aspects of this significant chain of psychological experiences will suggest themselves.

HOW THE COUNSELOR PROMOTES THE DEVELOPMENT OF INSIGHT

The Primary Technique. This reorientation and reorganization of the self, which has been illustrated in the case of Barbara,

is certainly the major aim and goal of counseling. It is natural that the question should be raised as to how the counselor can promote this increased self-understanding, this reorientation around new goals. The answer is bound to be a disappointing one to the overeager. The primary technique which leads to insight on the part of the client is one which demands the utmost in self-restraint on the counselor's part, rather than the utmost in action. The primary technique is to encourage the expression of attitudes and feelings, as discussed in the preceding chapter, until insightful understanding appears spontaneously. Insight is often delayed, and sometimes made impossible, by efforts of the counselor to create it or to bring it about. It is probably not delayed, and certainly never made impossible, by those interviewing approaches which encourage full expression of attitudes.

It will be noted that although other techniques are evident in the case of Barbara, techniques which we shall discuss, the most profound and helpful insights, the understandings which are most effective for reorganization, are those which she expresses spontaneously. Thus the main aim of the counselor is to assist the client to drop any defensiveness, any feeling that attitudes should not be brought into the open, any concern that the counselor may criticize or suggest or order. If this aim can be accomplished, then the client is freed to look at the total situation in its reality, without having to justify or protect himself. It is then that he can see relationships clearly, and can recognize the hitherto hidden impulses within himself.

This course of action imposes much self-restraint upon the counselor. The reason is simple. As the client reveals himself more and more fully in the counseling interviews, the counselor begins to develop insight into the client's problems. Not infrequently the major patterns of reaction are relatively clear to the counselor at the end of the first or second interview. There is the greatest temptation to most counselors, whether they are psychiatrists, psychologists, guidance counselors, or social workers, to inform the client as to his patterns, to interpret his actions and his personality to him. We have already seen

(Chapter II, page 26) the type of reception this is likely to receive. The more accurate the interpretation, the more likely it is to encounter defensive resistance. The counselor and his interpretations become something to be feared. To resist this temptation to interpret too quickly, to recognize that insight is an experience which is achieved, not an experience which can be imposed, is an important step in progress for the counselor.

Indeed, it might be said that for the less experienced counselor it is safer and more satisfactory to make use of no interpretive or special techniques for the promotion of insight. If the counselor adequately recognizes the client's attitudes, helps in the process of clarification of feelings, and promotes free expression, new insight will come of itself and can be recognized by the counselor as it occurs.

Excerpted from:

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