

Home Movies of Early Childhood: Correlative Developmental Data in the Psychoanalysis of Adults

Abstract. During the course of psychoanalytic practice, it has been possible to review with specific patients sequential films taken by their parents, beginning with the earliest weeks of infancy. The photographic evidence, combined with the patient's accompanying verbal associations, sheds additional light on evolving behavioral patterns such as affective expression, communication with others, and motility and its mastery, as well as early social interactions, and serves to correlate with reconstructions made from psychoanalytic data.

In addition to what a patient says as free associations and how he behaves during analysis in the unfolding of transference, he may offer data about his life in other forms. Among such incidental sources of helpful information that have come to my attention are photographs, diaries, baby books, writings, art works and other artifacts, and, more recently, 8-mm and 16-mm sequential motion pictures, in color, taken under ordinary family circumstances and stored away for periods of up to 25 years. In several instances, patients who had privately reviewed such movies of themselves, apparently to stimulate memories, mentioned them to me in passing. One patient offered to show such a film to me in order to illustrate a point about his early environment, and I agreed to have him do so, but only when I thought it technically appropriate and helpful in his treatment. When that time came, he set up his projector in my office, and as he showed his collated but unedited films, he described both the historical period and his introspective observations about them. Because of the stage that his treatment had reached, it was necessary to dwell on his motives in looking at the films again, in wanting to show them to me, and on certain confrontations, the significance of which he had missed. Under somewhat similar circumstances I saw childhood movies of two other patients.

For the psychoanalyst, watching these movies of childhood in their chronological order is like watching the product of time-lapse photography. In each case, in about half an hour the patient and I saw a sequence of developmental changes that had taken place over the period of his first 5 to 7 years. Using a frame of reference roughly similar to the "critical periods"

described by Scott (1) and the development of communication between human infant and mother traced by Spitz (2), we were able to observe "lines of development" and to assess some of them as suggested by A. Freud (3). The concurrent developmental sequences of the siblings were also available for comparison.

The patient and I were able to see his earliest "smiling response" at about 2 months, anxiety at the presence of a stranger, before his first birthday, and the transitions from symbiotic behavior to the individuation and autonomy of patterned motor behavior. We saw him being fed and later sitting up and feeding himself. He rose to the crawling position, crawled, stood up with the help of one or both parents, and then walked alone. For our purposes it was also important to note the evolution of the capacity for "dialogue" (2) as it developed to include his siblings, as well as the parents behind the camera, and any changes in its character.

Thus the scenes provided data of the kind that result from direct observation (2). But because of the time-lapse effect, we were able to see depicted certain additional aspects of each of these epochs—alterations in responsiveness and communication under the impact of environmental change occurring during development, including maladaptive patterns, some of which persisted into the present modes of communication with the psychoanalyst. Especially prominent at about 18 months and at 30 months were changes in personality after the introduction into the environment of younger siblings. Later, birthday parties or beach parties provided the occasion for other social interactions that could be observed. Unlike films taken under laboratory conditions, home movies

permit us to see not only the scenes to which the parent-photographer wishes to direct attention but also his implicit design and intent and suggested motivations. That which was planned may be obstructed by the unexpected, and the film, being unedited, reveals the frustration of the parent caught up in the momentum of the planned sequence. The insistence of the photographer on maintaining his fixed position and design reveals an unexpected but characteristic dialogue with the child (4).

Anna Freud (3) observes that the very young are quite transparent and readily betray to the adult such affects as pleasurable anticipation, disappointment, jealousy, and mortification. In the process of further development these affective expressions undergo transformation as a result of the defense functions of the psychological system Ego, perhaps even becoming reversed. Such transformations have been observed in these films by the patients themselves. In two instances they appeared with the introduction of new siblings into the environment, the initial reactions being transparent, then becoming complex.

Psychoanalytic reconstructions for the same period had already been made in the treatment situation. The unexpected but clearly visible realities added yet another method for the corroboration of clinical constructs built up from the introspective experience of the adult patient.

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References and Notes

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3. A. Freud, *The Ego and Its Mechanisms of Defense* (International Universities Press, New York, 1946); "Assessment of childhood disturbances," *Psychoanal. Study Child* 17, 149 (1962).
4. H. M. Serota, motion picture demonstration of "The Value of Home Movies for the Confirmation of Psychoanalytic Reconstructions," shown at the Institute for Psychoanalysis, Chicago, 9 Nov. 1963.

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