

PERSONALITY DISORDERS: CASE STUDIES

CASE 1:

Raymond is a 42-year-old man who is an architect in a large firm. He is known for his attention to details. His boss has been known to comment, "Give the blueprint to Raymond. If there's a screw loose or a fixture missing he'll spot it." Unfortunately, Raymond's attention to detail makes it difficult for him to complete an entire project on his own. Furthermore, none of the junior architects will work with him because he will not allow them to express their ideas in a design. He insists that they exactly follow his directions.

Despite these handicaps, the firm values Raymond for his uncompromising devotion to his work and his extreme conscientiousness. They put up with his personal quirks like his extensive collection of broken pencils, eraser nubs, bits of broken lead, and used interdepartmental envelopes. However, his rigidity has significantly limited his advancement in the firm.

CASE 2:

Florence is a 33-year-old woman who has been married for 10 years. She and her husband met in college while Florence was living at home and got married immediately after graduation. Her husband, Stan, works for a newspaper. The couple have two children, aged 5 and 7. Florence is a quiet woman who has few opinions of her own. When someone asks for her judgment about an issue, she shrugs and replies, "I don't really think about those things. I guess I'm really stupid. Why don't you ask my husband." Her husband always has an opinion about every issue and makes all of the decisions in the house. Florence has learned to agree with him no matter what he says.

Early in their marriage, before the kids were born, Florence decided to redecorate the house. She spoke to an interior decorator and went to several stores looking at paint, wallpaper, furniture, and carpeting. She called the interior decorator two or three times a day for advice. When he finally refused to speak with her more than once a week, Florence turned to her sister for advice. Her first big task was deciding what color to paint the walls. She asked her sister, "I don't know whether they should be a light purple or more neutral, like a beige. What do you think?" Her sister suggested beige. Florence called 2 hours later and asked, "Are you sure the beige will look OK? Should the trim be the same color?" Her sister wearily answered, "Beige will look fine for the walls and the trim, Sis."

After several more days of frequent telephone calls, her sister refused to help and said, "Why don't you ask Stan what he thinks? He's going to live in the house too." Her husband had little patience for her indecisiveness. He met with the interior decorator and made all the final decisions.

Since that time her husband has assumed responsibility for all the major decisions in the home. Florence is afraid to disagree with him for fear he won't

approve of her behavior. She is also fearful that he might get disgusted with her and leave because she is so inept. When her husband works late or goes on a business trip, Florence is plagued by fears that she will be unable to care for herself or that he will find another woman.

CASE 3:

Dennis is a 37-year-old single man who works as a clerk in the accounting department of a large bank. He is shy, dependable, and goes about his job quietly, trying to please his superiors. Although he has been working at the bank for 5 years, he has made few friends among his fellow workers and has little social contact with them outside of work.

Sally is an exception. She is a quiet, widowed woman in her early 40s who has worked as a teller at the bank for many years. Gradually, over a period of 2-3 years, Dennis and Sally became friends. Sally initiated the contact by saying, "Hello," to Dennis every time she passed his desk and asking if she could get him anything when she went out for coffee. Dennis was initially shy and chose to ignore her friendly overtures. He later told her, "I couldn't believe you wanted to talk with me. I thought you would think I was stupid and make fun of me once we started talking." Sally's persistence was finally rewarded with a few small smiles from Dennis after he became convinced that she really did like him.

Sally tried to get Dennis to be more sociable. "You just need more self-confidence," she told him. Despite her urging he was still reluctant to go to parties or bank social activities, fearing that he would spill food on someone or make some other embarrassing blunder and be criticized for being socially inept.

Dennis' lack of confidence also extended to his work. A few months ago he turned down a promotion that would have required more responsibility and involvement with bank customers. He told Sally, "I didn't think I could do the job. My boss would be watching me. If I made any mistakes with customers, he would get angry with me and get rid of me or send me back to my old job. I couldn't face that." Sally tried to be supportive but felt frustrated by Dennis' unwillingness to take chances to improve himself.

CASE 4:

Spencer is a 51-year-old man who is the chairman of a medical department in a small medical school. His staff know him more for his wine cellar than his empathy. Each faculty member is invited to his house for dinner when they first join the department. Spencer takes them on a tour of his cellar and grandly picks a bottle of wine for the meal. During dinner his young wife carefully doles out the wine, making sure that no one takes more than their share.

The discussions at dinner cover a range of topics but

inevitably settle on the chairman and his experiences, achievements, goals, and aspirations. His wife sits next to her husband smiling and nodding as he talks, periodically emphasizing the importance of his achievements. Other faculty members add their appreciative comments. The chairman smiles, accepting their admiration without embarrassment.

At work Spencer is less approachable. He is reluctant to spend time talking with his faculty, preferring to associate with other chairmen, the Dean, and members of the Board of Trustees at the faculty club. He tells his secretary, "The Dean and the Board are the only ones who really understand my expansion plans."

In reality he is an inconsistent and ineffectual administrator. His major goal is to see that the faculty bring money into the department to support his lifestyle. Spencer routinely manipulates staff to achieve his goals with minimal concerns for their needs and discomfort. He is intolerant of any criticism or opposition to his decisions. When criticized, he becomes enraged but covers his anger with superficial pleasantries and then makes plans to punish the offender.

Spencer expects complete compliance with his wishes and active recognition of his achievements. He is involved in many national activities and is frequently away from the hospital at meetings. After returning, he subtly drops the names of important people he has met and emphasizes his powerful political contacts.

CASE 5:

Vince is an unemployed 25-year-old man who has been repeatedly arrested for running illegal card games (e.g. three card monte) on the street in the large city where he lives. His victims are usually tourists. When he is asked why he tries to swindle people, he laughs and replies, "If these people are stupid enough to play my game, they deserve to have their money taken. I run a business just like they do. They don't have to shop with me. They're greedy and want to beat me."

Vince has a long history of rebellious behavior. As a child he lied to his parents, stole money from his mother, and engaged in repeated shoplifting. He was difficult to control as an adolescent and often stayed out late at night despite his parents attempts to set a curfew. Vince was arrested once for breaking into a neighbor's house with a friend.

He started using drugs at age 13 and soon was stealing and selling stolen property to make money. He dropped out of high school before graduating and moved to an apartment that he shared with two friends. Vince has held several jobs for a few weeks at a time but was unable to comply with the job requirements. Eventually, he always returns to the streets where he continues hustling people to make a living.

CASE 6:

Lucy is a 32-year-old woman who lives alone on

welfare in a small apartment. She has few friends and little family. Her neighbors consider her peculiar and the neighborhood children often tease her about her appearance. Lucy's clothes appear slightly askew and her makeup is unusual. She wears heavy eye shadow, plucks her eyebrows, and pencils thin lines in their place. The two penciled eyebrows are drawn at a slightly different angles, adding to her bizarre appearance.

Her behavior is also unusual and she is often seen watching the neighborhood children from her window, partially hidden behind the curtains. Lucy is generally suspicious of other people and often makes strange gestures when she passes people in the street. Her social worker reports that Lucy is always anxious during their meetings and has a very limited range of emotional expression. This is accompanied by unusual beliefs and patterns of thought. Lucy explains that she has special powers, "My body is a lightening rod for the thoughts of others." She believes that she knows what other people are thinking and uses this knowledge to protect herself from their attempts to control her.

CASE 7:

Brad is a 33-year-old man who always liked rats and computers. As a boy he had a small collection of snakes, spiders, and mice in his bedroom. When he was age 10, he bought his first white rat. He was so fascinated with the rat that he soon he got rid of his other animals and began breeding rats in the basement. His parents were not happy. His rather complained to a friend, "What kind of kid spends all his time in the basement with rats!"

When Brad was age 13 he bought his first computer kit and spent long hours in his room programming. He rarely went out with his classmates and never had a date with a girl. In school he was considered a loner; aloof and detached but harmless. He did not participate in school activities and seemed unconcerned about what others thought of him. Brad's interactions with his peers were usually uncomfortable and his occasional attempts at humor seemed strained and off target. His major academic interest was philosophy and he would spend many hours reading Camus and other Existential philosophers.

After high school Brad went to college where he majored in computer sciences. The only negative incident in college occurred when the dormitory authorities discovered his rat colony and insisted that he remove it. Brad responded by moving into his own apartment so he could keep his rats. After college he took a job in a large company as a computer programmer and systems analyst. He did well, working the night shift. He remained detached, had few friends, and spent little time with his family.

CASE 8:

Emily is a 24-year-old woman who recently arrived in a new city to begin graduate studies at a large university. She moved into an apartment with three other women

graduate students who had been living together for the past 2 years. The relationship between Emily and her roommates appeared to go well initially. She became very attached to one of the women and idealized her to the point that she began dressing like the roommate.

The woman started to feel uncomfortable when Emily confided that she felt so much like the roommate that they could be twins. The other roommates also began feeling uneasy about her behavior. She demanded more and more of their time, frequently becoming angry if one of the roommates decided not to eat dinner in the apartment with the other women. Emily seemed to need constant attention and complained of feeling bored and empty most of the time. She had mood swings, feeling elated at one moment and depressed, angry, or empty the next.

Emily was attractive and dated several men. She described each man in glowing terms initially and usually had sex with them soon after the first date. The relationships with her boyfriends were brief and intense. They usually ended after a few weeks when the boyfriend left. One of the men confided to a roommate, "I feel like she's eating me alive. I can't walk out of the apartment without her asking me where I'm going and accusing me of not caring for her."

Emily felt depressed and empty when the relationships ended. One night, following the tumultuous end of another relationship, a roommate walked into the bathroom and found Emily cutting her thigh with a razor blade. The thigh was scarred from multiple past cuts. The roommate screamed and Emily stopped and said, "Cutting helps make me feel better when I'm upset." Two days later the roommates met and decided that Emily had to move out of the apartment. She was enraged but agreed to go telling them that they were all worthless and would be sorry. She moved out the next day. Subsequently, all three roommates found that several of their dresses had been slashed with a razor blade and ruined.

CASE 9:

Neil is a 28-year-old man who has worked as a car mechanic in the service garage of an automobile dealership for the last 2 years. He is considered a reasonably good mechanic but is difficult to work with because he is touchy, suspicious, and easily slighted. His behavior has led to a number of confrontations with other mechanics and supervisors. The dealership is reluctant to fire him because good mechanics are difficult to find.

Recently, he was called into the foreman's office after an argument with two fellow workers. The argument started when a customer brought an old car into the shop for repair. Neil was assigned to repair it. He was unhappy with the assignment, claiming it was unfair because it would take too long to get parts for the car and repair it. Neil told one co-worker that the supervisor assigned the car to him to make him look bad. When the co-worker expressed some doubt, Neil looked at him and said, "You think I'm lying. All you

people are like that. You all want to get rid of me." The co-worker initially became angry, and then walked away shaking his head.

Neil started working on the car and turned in a list of parts. Several had to be ordered. He checked every day to see if the parts had arrived. After several days of inquiry, the head of the parts department told him to wait until he was called about the parts. Neil became convinced that the man was trying to disrupt his work and told him so. The parts manager replied, "You're nuts," and began working on something else. When the order finally arrived, Neil discovered that two parts were incorrect. He accused the worker and the manager of the department of sabotaging his work. The argument ended when the foreman called Neil into the office to resolve the dispute. Although this quarrel escalated more than usual, in many respects it was typical of the arguments he has with fellow workers. Neil makes some people uncomfortable even when he is calm and businesslike. He scares the women in the billing office. One of the women commented, "Whenever he's around he watches me and notices every little thing I do. It's creepy. It makes me so nervous I make mistakes. Then he gets irritated and condescending and points out my mistakes." Another woman added, "He's a real cold fish. Polite, but watch out. He got angry with me a year ago when I didn't immediately notice he was standing at my desk. He's still mad."

CASE 10:

Carla is a 35-year-old divorced woman who is heavily involved in the local art scene. She routinely holds "court" in a neighborhood coffeehouse where she is known for her dramatic entrances – barefoot with swirling peasant skirts and bells on her ankles. Carla finds it impossible to sit quietly and unobtrusively at any gathering of more than one person. She has an opinion about every piece of art hanging in the coffeehouse or selling in nearby galleries. Her critiques are usually based on an immediate emotional reaction to the artwork and are singularly lacking in intellectual details. Carla's opinions are delivered with exaggerated phrases accompanied by overly dramatic arm gestures and tosses of the head that swing her hair into the air.

She surrounds herself with a coterie of younger men and women who listen intently to her artistic pronouncements and appear amused by her behavior. Carla treats each of these people as close personal friends after a brief initial meeting. She embraces them at each subsequent meeting and often suggestively rubs her body against the men in a provocative sexual manner, breaking away before they can respond. Some of the men have misunderstood her friendliness and interpreted it as an invitation for further intimacy. When this occurs, Carla's warmth is rapidly transformed to mild irritation and she stiffens until the men rescale their affections to the appropriate level.

Source unknown