

Lars and the Real Girl: An Assessment

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Lars Lindstrom is a white man in his late twenties from Wisconsin. He currently lives with his brother and his brother's wife, Karin and Gus Lindstrom, who are expecting a child. Lars and Gus inherited the house from their late father, and Gus and his wife stay in the house while Lars stays in the garage that was converted into a space for him. Lars will occasionally engage with Gus and Karin, his co-workers and members of his church, but he mainly keeps to himself. Recently, Lars bought a life-sized doll that he presented to everyone as his girlfriend, Bianca. Lars does not interpret her as a doll, but as a human. He does not feel he has significant problems; however he mentioned to Gus that he did not understand what it meant to be an adult. Karin and Gus perceive multiple problems with Lars. They believe that he has trouble connecting with other people in multiple ways. Whenever Lars gets invited to dinner, Karin has to persistently ask him. They also believe that calling a doll his girlfriend and interacting with her as a real person is extremely problematic. This assessment will focus on Lars when he started his relationship with Bianca.

### **Assessment of Ego Functioning**

Ego functioning is how the unconscious part of your brain negotiates the balance of your interactions with other people, your morals (superego) and impulses (id), and reality (K. Anderson, personal communication, March 5, 2014). A person's ego functioning can be strong, weak, or impaired. In the twelve areas of ego functioning, Lars shows room for growth, but currently he is either impaired or weak in all forms of ego functioning.

**Reality Testing**

Lars is present in his life and is aware of the time and place. He understands that he has responsibilities, such as going to work and being presentable, and therefore goes to work consistently and on time. There is however a lack of orientation with himself, an example being his creation of Bianca. He was present when he ordered Bianca and custom made her on the life-size doll website, but when she arrived in the mail, he stated that this was his girlfriend who just came in town. He speaks to her even though she does not speak back, and interacts with her on multiple levels in the same way that people would interact with each other. Since this is evidence of a very prominent delusion, Lars has weak reality testing.

**Sense of Judgment**

A person's sense of judgment is connected to their reality testing, so Lars also has a weak sense of judgment. He chooses behaviors that help him move towards his goal (getting a girlfriend) but those behaviors and decisions are still based in his delusion ("getting" a girlfriend by buying a doll on the internet and pretending that she is real). It is important to note that his judgment is not always connected to his delusion. For example, he had a conversation with Gus about when he knew that he was man. After Gus listed reasons and examples, Lars reflected and made a judgment call about his life that promoted his goals.

**Sense of Identity**

Lars's sense of identity is impaired. While he has a physical sense of himself, his psychological sense is more distorted. He has excessive psychological boundaries with other people. He distances himself from his brother and sister-in-law, and friends at his job and church. Specifically at his job, a coworker named Margo tries to connect with him multiple times, and it was an extended period of time before he decided to go bowling with her and a group of people.

This relates with his physical alienation from others and his internal alienation. His internal alienation is noted through his struggle to identify and understand what it means to be a man, and how he is supposed to know when he is a man.

### **Impulse and Affect Control**

Due to the over-controlling of his impulses and feelings, Lars has impaired impulse and affect control. He wears multiple layers of clothing, which can be interpreted as a way to control how much contact he has with others and the environment. He also tends to control his feelings and emotions until they become overwhelming, and result in panic attacks. Regarding impulses, it was hard to detect what impulses he had, which could also be a result of more over-controlling tendencies.

### **Thought Process Regulation**

Lars has weak thought process regulations because he is capable of remembering situations and taking the appropriate steps and actions, but they are based in his delusions. A main example is when he habitually took Bianca to the doctor because Dr. Dagmar noted that she needed to see her weekly to monitor her blood pressure and help her get better. He would also make sure to take Bianca to her volunteering at the hospital and working as a mannequin.

### **Interpersonal/Object Relations**

The presence of Bianca implies that Lars has impaired interpersonal/object relations. His sense of self is relative to his relationship with her, which is not a mature and interpersonal relationship. He manages the majority of his relationships with people in town through her, and struggles with separating Bianca from Karin and his mother. Lars mentioned Bianca losing her mother through childbirth, the same way that he did, and he takes care of and is protective of Bianca in a way that a parent (in his case, a mother) would take care of and be protective of a

child. Since he did not get to have that experience with his mother, or his father since he was too busy mourning his wife, Lars seems to replicate what that relationship would look like if his mother were alive.

### **Autonomous Functions**

Lars's autonomous functions are weak due to his habit of using coping skills that are no longer necessary. When his father passed away and Gus moved out of the house, he spent more time to himself because his father was not in a stable position to interact with Lars in a healthy way. When Lars moved in with his brother, he maintained that coping skill of being by himself despite having the support he lacked when he was younger.

### **Adaptive Use of Defenses**

Regarding his adaptive use of defenses, Lars is weak. While he uses some defenses in a healthy way, they are still within his significant delusion. For example, when Gus initially hints at the fact that Bianca is not real, Lars ignores the comment and shifts the conversation. This is a use of denial because addressing that Bianca is not real would be too anxiety-inducing. He also utilizes projection when he explained to Dr. Dagmar that he was worried about Karin. When she asked to elaborate, he said that he thinks she has a problem because she always wants to hug people. He noted that some people do not like to get hugged. It may be possible that he sees things that he does as a problem, but instead of acknowledging it, he chose to focus on Karin and say that she had a problem that he was worried about.

### **Stimulus Barrier**

Lars has an impaired stimulus barrier. He struggles greatly with being touched and equated getting hugs with feeling like a burn. Dr. Dagmar tested how much she could touch him before it became too triggering, and she touched him on the shoulder and that was too much for

him. The stimulus barrier also contributes to him wearing multiple layers to protect him from contact. This could be due to the lack of contact between Lars and his father, especially after his mother passed away.

### **Adaptive Regression in Service of the Ego**

Adaptive regression appeared when Lars took Bianca to a treehouse where he and Gus used to play as children. In that same timeframe, Bianca first went to the doctor's and Gus referred to Bianca as plastic. To avoid feeling more anxiety, he regressed to a childhood memory that was pleasant. It could be argued that some regression also occurred when Lars offered Karin his blanket because she was outside, and then specifically asked for it back after he had dinner with them. It seemed to be a literal security blanket that he was able to let go of, but potential areas of anxiety for him at dinner caused him to ask for it back. Lars has an impaired adaptive regression.

### **Mastery/Competence**

The community genuinely engaged with Lars when Bianca arrived, so he has a very strong influence on his environment. However, he does not understand how much his community was adjusting themselves to fit him, and does not realize how much power he has over the community. It could be argued that his lack of power and understanding could be the reason why the community reached out and engaged with him and Bianca. Their efforts to normalize the situation were not because he has control over influencing the environment, but because they have control over him. However, even if that were the reasoning, he is still influencing his environment. His level of functioning is weak.

**Synthetic/Integrative Function**

Lars has impaired synthetic/integrative function because he is not integrated in multiple aspects of his life. Bianca is a part of himself that he had to split in order to process it on his own terms. He is also having a hard time with identifying with his adult self. The formation of his values and self-representations are still being molded through his use of Bianca and conversations with people he trusts like his brother and Dr. Dagmar.

**Diagnosis**

Axis I 297.1 Delusional Disorder, Unspecified Type, (provisional)

Axis II 799.9 Defer

Axis III None

Axis IV None

Axis V 42

For Delusional Disorder, a client must have the presence of one or more delusions with duration of one month or longer and criterion A for schizophrenia has never been met. Also, the delusion itself has an impact on the client, but other than that functioning is not significantly impaired and there is not obviously bizarre or odd behavior. It is also noted that if manic or major depressive episode has occurred, they are brief relative to the delusional periods. The final criteria are that the symptoms are not better explained by another mental disorder and are not due to drug use or a medical condition. Lars fits the criteria for a Delusional Disorder. The unspecified type specify category was used because his delusion did not fit criteria for the other specify categories. For Axis II, not enough information is available to determine if there is a personality disorder.

Lars is physically healthy, and does not have environmental or psychosocial factors negatively influencing his mental disorder. With GAF scoring, Lars was given a 42 due to his delusion. He does not have trouble with the law or his job, but he does have significant impairment with his relationships and problems with panic attacks.

### **Strengths and Goals**

The strengths assessment showed that Lars has significant resources because he has a car, a house, a job and financial resources. With his family and relationships, he has his brother and his sister-in-law for support. He also has colleagues at work and Margo, who could become a close friend. He is also in good health and has social supports from his community and the local church. Regarding his wants, Lars wants to stay in his home and be independent. We do not have enough information to determine what he wants financially or vocationally, it can possibly be assumed that he wants things that will make him feel more like an adult.

Lars will focus on three goals. His first goal will be to enhance his stimulus barriers related to physical touch. His objective will be to receive one high five a week. His action step finding opportunities to receive a high five (i.e. congratulating someone at work with a high five) His second goal will be to diminish his autonomous functions. The objective will involve accepting an invitation to go to the lake with Karin and Gus once a month. His action step will involve accepting the invite and walking with them to the lake. His final goal is to increase his use of adaptive defenses. The objective will be to take his anxious energy and transfer it into journaling. The action step will involve writing in journal once a week if he feels anxious. With Lars's strengths and support systems, his goals are certainly within reach.



### Lars and the Real Girl Assessment

In the Lars and the Real Girl assignment in Strategies in Clinical Social Work Intervention, we watched the movie *Lars and the Real Girl* and then complete an assessment of Lars and his mental state, specifically his ego functioning. I chose this assignment because of all of my essays; this is the most comprehensive in terms of assessment and practice diagnosis. The paper meets core competency 7: apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment. Ego psychology was utilized to assess the levels of Lar's mental status. After assessing him on multiple levels, a diagnosis was established, along with some strengths-based assessments and goal setting.

My future educational plans will involve becoming more comfortable with diagnosis and the DSM 5, in particular being more comfortable with understanding how diagnoses clients have received from other helping professionals have impacted the micro, mezzo and macro levels. For example, if a have a client that I believe has an inappropriate diagnosis, or the diagnosis may be in remission, I would want to consult with other helping professionals to get their viewpoints. I also want to utilize systems theory and social learning theories among others to find the most appropriate clinical intervention/strategy for the client.