

THE "VOICE": THE DUAL NATURE OF GUILT REACTIONS

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Human beings spend their lives in a restricted range of personal relationships and experiences. Their freedom and initiative are constricted by a self-destructive process. Furthermore, their internal conflict is primarily unconscious, and they are generally unaware of the circle of guilt that limits them.

Guilt reactions are mediated by an internal thought process or dialogue referred to here as the "voice." The voice is a system of negative thoughts, antithetical to the self, that plays a major part in human suffering and significantly limits an individual's goal-directed behavior. The voice represents the introjected negative thoughts and hostile attitudes of one's parents, and it ranges from unconscious or subliminal to fully conscious. The form and substance of experience that people permit themselves is regulated by this system of self-accusatory thoughts and injunctions. To whatever degree these self-critical thoughts remain unconscious, they cause considerable damage, and the individual is unable to break the cycle.

The "voice" of the so-called normal or neurotic individual is directly analogous to the hallucinated voices of the schizophrenic person. The content of these voices, when analyzed, reveals the same regulatory process and is characterized by the same hostility and vindictiveness toward the self.

The concept of guilt refers to an insidious process of self-limitation and self-hatred that seriously restricts people's lives. Out of a sense of guilt, people become self-denying, self-defeating, self-destructive, and even suicidal. The "voice" represents the thought process underlying the behavior noted above.

NEUROTIC AND EXISTENTIAL GUILT

There are two distinguishable forms of guilt that create a basic conflict in each individual: neurotic guilt and existential guilt. It is useful for purposes

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of delineation to conceptualize them as follows: the first, termed *neurotic guilt*, may be defined as feelings of remorse, shame, or self-attack for seeking gratification, for moving toward one's goals, and for pursuing one's wants. The person essentially characterizes him or herself as "selfish." This form of guilt reaction appears to be related to emotional deprivation, parental prohibitions, and faulty training procedures in childhood.

Becker (1964) defined neurotic guilt as "the action-bind that reaches out of the past to limit new experiences, to block the possibility of broader choices" (p. 186). He attributed the cause of this constriction of life to the "early indoctrination" of the child.

In his essay, "The Ego and the Id" (1923), Freud delineated two kinds of neurotic guilt: (1) conscious guilt (conscience) "based on the tension between the ego and the ego ideal . . . the expression of a condemnation of the ego by its critical agency" (*Std. Ed.*, Vol. 19, p. 51); and (2) an unconscious sense of guilt that Freud believed to be the basis of the patient's "negative therapeutic reaction" (*ibid.*, p. 49) to progress or to praise from the therapist. The reappearance of symptoms signified an underlying, *unconscious guilt* ("as far as the patient is concerned this sense of guilt is dumb; it does not tell him he is guilty; he does not feel guilty, he feels ill"; *ibid.*, pp. 49-50). This guilt "expresses itself only as a resistance to recovery which . . . is extremely difficult to overcome" (*ibid.*, p. 50). Freud was confounded by the punitive aspects of this unconscious guilt reaction:

How is it that the super-ego manifests itself essentially as a sense of guilt (or rather, as criticism—for the sense of guilt is the perception in the ego answering to this criticism) and moreover develops such extraordinary harshness and severity towards the ego? (*ibid.*, p. 53)

Freud and Becker see neurotic guilt as preventing an individual from achieving satisfaction or fulfillment in life, as well as interfering with his progress in psychotherapy. The author's (1985) views concerning neurotic guilt are similar to Becker's and Freud's formulations:

[Neurotic guilt reactions arise] when a person chooses self-actualization. . . . If we chose to go against our inhibitions and spontaneously embrace life, we would then have to deal with the fear and guilt aroused by our affirmation of individuality and personal power. We would experience anxiety from having separated ourselves from our bonds with others and would be vulnerable to guilt for surpassing our parents and contemporaries. (p. 260)

The second type of guilt, termed *existential or ontological guilt*, is triggered by holding back or withholding one's natural inclinations. It is generally experienced by individuals when they turn their backs on their goals,

retreat from life, or seek gratification in fantasy. Rollo May (1958) has described this form of guilt as

rooted in the fact of self-awareness. Ontological guilt does not consist of I-am-guilty-because-I-violate-parental-prohibitions, but arises from the fact that I can see myself as the one who can choose or fail to choose. (p. 55)

When the person denies these potentialities, fails to fulfill them, his condition is *guilt*. (p. 52)

Yalom (1980) discusses existential guilt in terms of responsibility and states: "Most simply put: one is guilty not only through transgressions against another or against some moral or social code, but *one may be guilty of transgression against oneself*" (p. 277). Yalom quotes Paul Tillich in further elaborating the concept of existential guilt and shows its relationship to ontological anxiety (p. 278):

Man's being is not only given to him but also demanded of him. He is responsible for it; literally, he is required to answer, if he is asked, *what he has made of himself*. He who asks him is his judge, namely he himself. The situation produces the anxiety which in relative terms is the anxiety of guilt, in absolute terms the anxiety of self-rejection or condemnation. Man is asked to make of himself what he is supposed to become, to fulfill his destiny. (Tillich, 1952, p. 52)

Yalom concludes that "there is a general consensus among . . . [Heidegger, Tillich, Maslow, and May] that existential guilt is a positive constructive force, a guide calling oneself back to oneself" (p. 280). According to Yalom, the failure to acknowledge one's existential guilt inevitably leads to confusion, despair, and alienation such as is experienced by Joseph K. in Kafka's novel, *The Trial* (1937). Constricted by neurotic guilt, leading a banal existence, yet stubbornly unaware of his acts of omission, Joseph K. is imprisoned (symbolically) within the narrow boundaries defined by neurotic guilt and existential guilt.

Abraham Maslow (1968) has also pointed out the sense of loathing one experiences when one moves toward security and stasis rather than striving for personal growth or "self-actualization":

If this essential core of the person is denied or suppressed, he gets sick sometimes in obvious ways, sometimes in subtle ways. . . . Every falling away . . . [from our core], every crime against one's own nature . . . *records itself* in our unconscious and makes us despise ourselves. (pp. 4-5)

The author agrees with Maslow's view of existential guilt, and has recently written: "Acting in opposition to one's basic wants has serious consequences;

it implies a withdrawal of affect and psychic energy from external objects, which is a movement toward stillness and psychological death" (Firestone and Seiden, 1987).

Guilt feelings and anxiety reactions are aroused by positive as well as negative circumstances. For example, if people achieve more than their parents did, if they seek gratification of wants denied them in their families, they experience painful feelings of self-recrimination. If, however, they submit to this guilt and regress to an inward posture of passivity and fantasy, they become progressively more demoralized and self-hating. In a certain sense, each individual is suspended between these polarities of guilt, and they form the boundaries of his or her life experience.

The author's objectives in this paper are to elucidate the basic relationship between guilt, regression, and self-destructive behavior and to introduce the concept of the "voice." If we are to interrupt regressive trends and modify self-destructive behaviors, we must first be able to identify the patterns of thought at the core of these phenomena. It is important to understand that the same mechanism that operates in psychotic states of regression and self-destructive acting out in the schizophrenic patient is operating, to a lesser degree, in the neurotic or "normal" individual, fostering guilt reactions and depression.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SEPARATION AND GUILT

The inordinate force of moral authority derives from the conditions of the first psychological birth, when an infant's physical and psychological survival depended entirely on the protection and approval of her parents. Dread of loss [of the parents] . . . can make cowardly, submissive infants of us all—which is why the human conscience is so largely an instrument of the status quo. It is ruthless in its opposition to change. It preserves the past. (Kaplan, 1984, p. 110)

Both guilt feelings and fear arise when there is a threat of separation—separation from the mother, from parents and parental substitutes, and the ultimate separation from self and loved ones in death. There is considerable guilt as an individual moves toward independence and self-realization, thereby separating from the bond¹ or imaginary connection with the family. On the other hand, there is guilt if one attempts to maintain one's fantasy of connection with his family for purposes of security. The failure to differentiate oneself from the mother or other family members inevitably leads to regressive behavior that sets up a pattern of guilt reactions.

R. D. Laing (1961) has portrayed the dualistic nature of guilt relating to destructive bonds in his discussion of collusion:

The one person does not use the other merely as a hook to hang projections on. He strives to find in the other, or to induce the other to become, the very *embodiment* of projection. The other person's collusion is required to 'complement' the identity self feels impelled to sustain. One can experience a peculiar form of guilt, specific, I think, to this disjunction. If one refuses collusion, one feels guilt for not being or not becoming the embodiment of the complement demanded by the other for his identity. However if one *does* succumb, if one is seduced, one becomes estranged from one's self and is guilty thereby of self-betrayal. (p. 111)

Laing, in effect, is describing both types of guilt: the guilty feelings aroused when one separates from a bond and, by contrast, the existential guilt that arises when a person surrenders his or her individuality for the security connection. Being original, nonconformist, separate, and independent creates anxiety and guilt and may lead to regressive behavior and increased dependency, whereas submitting to the attachment, remaining fused or linked to the family and later to one's mate for imagined safety also generates feelings of guilt and self-castigation.

Otto Rank was well aware of the contradictory sources of guilt and its dualistic structure. He wrote extensively about guilt reactions in relation to the problem of the "will" and parental prohibitions. However, he perceived that guilt feelings were also reactions to separation experiences. The author's understanding of the role that neurotic guilt plays in causing a constriction of life-affirming activities is in accord with Rank's thinking. In his essay on "Separation and Guilt," Rank (1936) writes:

The problem of the neurosis itself is a separation problem and as such a blocking of the human life principle, the conscious ability to endure release and separation, first from the biological power represented by parents, and finally from the lived out parts of the self which this power represents, and which obstruct the development of the individual personality. It is at this point that the neurotic comes to grief, where, instead of living, of overcoming the past through the present, he becomes conscious that he dare not, cannot, loose himself because he is bound by guilt. (pp. 73-74)

Rank's reference to the "biological power represented by the parents" calls attention to a special transcendental quality that parents transmit to their children, that is, the possibility of triumphing over death by merging with the parents. However, the illusory merger is costly; the individual is too guilty to "loose himself" from his bonds.

In his brilliant synthesis of Rank's work, Becker (1973) writes of children's identification with their parents as being a "special case of the urge for immortality":

The child merges himself with the representatives of the cosmic process. . . . When one merges with the self-transcending parents . . . he is, in some real sense, trying to live in some larger expansiveness of meaning. (p. 152)

Both parents and child imagine their merger as somehow imbuing them with immortality. In this sense, the family symbolizes immortality; it is the link in an unending chain of persons passing on unique traits from one generation to the next.

Many parents, in believing that their children "belong" to them, have strong feelings of exclusivity and possessiveness in relation to their offspring. This sense of ownership stems partly from parents' deeply held, unconscious belief that through their children, they can achieve immortality. After all, their children are the products of the parents' bodies and extensions of themselves. To the extent that children resemble their parents in appearance, characteristics, and behavior, they are the parents' legacy to be left in the world after the parents' death as evidence that their lives were meaningful and made a difference. On the other hand, the more the child is differentiated from the parent in looks, in character traits, in behavior, or in significant career choices, the more guilt he feels about breaking the continuous chain symbolically linking the generations. By disrupting this continuity, the developing child becomes acutely aware of his vulnerability to death. He also becomes aware that his movement toward individuality and independence challenges his parents' immortality.

Therefore, in moving away from the family, the child experiences considerable guilt in relation to the pain and anxiety that he believes he is causing his parents. To avoid this guilt, the child tends to cling to the bond with his parents by maintaining a sameness with them rather than "living out the parts" of himself that would cause him to stand out from family patterns and traditions.

In other writings, the author (1985) has referred to the guilt and anger associated with separation experiences:

Each successive stage of maturity confronts the child and later, the adult, with the basic facts of personal existence—aleness and separateness, as well as the vulnerability to death. . . . Each phase is also marked by guilt at leaving the mother [parents] behind, and by anger and resentment at having to face the world alone. (pp. 173–174)

A number of other theorists have written about guilt reactions associated with separation and death anxiety (Guntrip, 1961). In his book, *Death Anxiety*, James B. McCarthy (1980) notes that a "psychological inquiry into the meaning of anxiety about going to school . . . very often discloses fears

that either the child will be hurt or killed or that his parents will be hurt or killed" (p. 65). In more serious cases of school phobias, McCarthy writes:

In severe phobias, the young child's fear of death arises not just out of a need for punishment or guilt but because he or she depends on and identifies with the parent. To this extent, the child may view himself or herself as a psychological extension of the parent. (p. 65)

Many adults retain strong feelings of being connected to the parent; consequently, "independence for either partner threatens the self with the loss of a part of the shared inner psychic structure" (p. 67). In other words, independence and individuation disrupt the fantasy bond with one's parents and arouse strong feelings of guilt and anxiety.

Threats of desertion or warnings to the child that he or she will be sent away because of "bad behavior," together with subtle or direct threats of parental illness or an emotional breakdown, occur in families more often than is commonly thought (Bowlby, 1973). Overprotectiveness toward children is also symptomatic of a strong fantasy bond in the family.

For example, a seven-year-old boy asked his parents if he could travel with his grandparents to their home in the country. Initially, the youngster was very happy and enjoyed the drive, but later became very agitated and wanted to return home. When questioned about his change of mind, the boy responded with: "Mommy said she would die if something happened to me. I want to go back so she won't die, so she can see I'm not hurt." His mother's unintentionally destructive statement about her concern for his safety had aroused the boy's guilt about being away from her for an extended period of time.

Children's guilt about their hostile fantasies of destroying the parental figure has been assumed by some clinicians to be a principal cause of the guilt and depression that they experience during actual separation (Klein, 1930). However, other explanations are also relevant and may be more parsimonious. For example, many parents experience considerable distress at their child's growing freedom and independence and openly indicate their displeasure. The child senses the parents' pain or grief over the anticipated loss and responds with guilt. If the parents are immature and dependent, these feelings are even more exaggerated, and the child comes to feel that movement toward adulthood and his own goals is mean or destructive.

Patients have reported numerous experiences where their parents, mates, or family members responded with episodes of physical illness when they (the patients) moved toward independence. For example, one young man was successfully manipulated by his mother's illness when he

was eighteen years old and striking out on his own. On the morning of the young man's departure on an extended automobile trip with a friend, his mother developed severe chest pains. She was convinced that she was having a heart attack. The young man's father prevailed upon him not to leave at this time because his departure would make his mother feel worse, and her condition might become critical as a result. Out of a deep sense of guilt, he cancelled his trip. Doctors placed his mother under observation, but released her three days later without discovering the cause of her symptoms.

This event was not an isolated incident and significantly affected the young man's approach to life. His guilt generalized to other situations, causing him to be fearful and nonassertive. It played a part in the formation of his basic character defenses of self-denial and passivity.

SELF-HATRED AND GUILT

There is a strong relationship between feelings of guilt and one's feelings of self-hatred. Theodore Rubin was well aware of the major importance of man's propensity for self-destruction. In his book, *Compassion and Self-Hate*, Rubin (1975) writes with an acute sensitivity of the methods that people use to destroy themselves:

We "murder" ourselves when we invoke self-hating devices and when we annihilate our potential for enjoying life's realistic good offerings. . . . These self-hating activities often have the special characteristics of being passed off as virtues. The victim rationalizes . . . guilt as a high sense of responsibility and morality. . . . [But guilt has] a depleting, fatiguing, constricting effect and . . . [is] ultimately destructive to self-esteem and to one's actual person. (pp. 72-73)

In a similar vein, the author (1985) has described the purpose of the "voice" in instilling guilt in the individual:

Withholding and self-denial are regulated by the destructive thought processes of the voice. . . . The effect of chronic patterns of withholding is an ultimate shutting down, a paralysis, of that part of the individual that strives for emotional health and growth—the part that contributes to feelings of self-esteem. (pp. 153-154)

Clinicians are familiar with the primary guilt reactions experienced by patients when they attempt to overcome inhibitions of the past and actively pursue a more fulfilling life. They understand the relationship of this form of guilt to early parental training and prohibitions. Similarly, they recognize that many patients feel a sense of guilt when they indulge in self-nourishing habits, e.g., masturbating, overeating, drinking to excess, smoking, or drug abuse. Less is understood of the existential guilt aroused by surrendering

one's independent point of view and submitting to sameness and conformity. We are not cognizant of the full extent to which people feel guilty when they retreat from life and act out a self-destructive, self-limiting process. In fact, a person's most stubborn or oppositional behavior centers around this form of guilt.

Individuals go to great lengths to cover up or hide their propensity for self-destruction. Patients in therapy are often the most defensive, disagreeable, and hostile toward the therapist when they are defending the acting out of self-destructive impulses or when they are attempting to deny their self-destructiveness. These urges are humiliating and shameful facets of the personality. To complicate matters, regressive behavior, unhappiness, even depression, often follow success and achievement and therefore appear illogical and inappropriate. Negative reactions to positive events seem perverse without a deeper understanding of man's basic fear of independence and separateness.

Both patients and psychotherapists fail to appreciate the full significance of the self-destructive process that is set into motion when one adopts an inward life style characterized by self-denial, role-playing, fantasy, and retreat. We recognize the dangers inherent in substituting fantasy gratification for actual satisfactions in the real world when they reach monumental proportions as in the psychoses, yet we remain largely unaware of the extent of microsuicidal behavior manifest by so-called normal individuals as they move through the life process.

SOURCES OF GUILT AND THE NEGATIVE SELF-CONCEPT

Guilt reactions represent the internalization of parental rejecting attitudes in relation to simple body needs, as well as the need for affectionate contact and love. Frustration of infantile urges and primitive hunger caused by emotional deprivation are at the core of guilt feelings and negative feelings toward self. When parents are unable to sensitively care for and love their children because of their own inadequacies or dependency needs, the child begins to feel guilty for expressing or even having natural wants and needs.

To some extent, everyone has experienced pain and anguish caused by inevitable deficiencies in the parenting process, outright parental inadequacies, rejection and deprivation in their early years. Thus all of us have developed varying degrees of guilt and self-hatred in relation to seeking gratification of our wants. We perceive, incorrectly, that if our wants and needs were refused or prohibited when we were children, then we must be bad or wrong for wanting and for attempting to fulfill ourselves in the present.

Furthermore, children repress their anger toward their parents for their (the parents') rejection and turn it on themselves. They accept the blame for being rejected, and from that point on relentlessly accuse themselves of being unworthy of love. Arieti (1955), in writing about the development of the "bad-child" image, has stated:

If the parent is punitive and anxiety-arousing, it is not because she is malevolent but because he, the child, is bad: Mother is right in being harsh and strict with him and showing how bad he is. The child who is raised in this environment and wants to maintain the image of the mother as a benevolent person, tends therefore to accept her negative appraisal of him. By accepting this negative appraisal, he develops the self-image of the bad child, that is, he considers himself inadequate, bad and has little self-esteem. (p. 48)

Early in his development, the child begins to introject this negative perception of himself and gradually takes on the parents' point of view about his or her actions, wants, and needs. It is this process of introjection that is responsible for the evolution of the pattern of negative, self-critical thoughts known as the "voice."

Because of their total dependency on their parents for their very survival, children cannot afford to see the situation as it actually is: that their parents are unable to meet their needs. When parents withhold their love from their children, they (the children) distort themselves, hoping to change themselves in order to earn this love. They have no choice but to think that there is something wrong with them if they are not loved. Therefore, children tend to idealize their parents, that is, they repress an awareness of their parents' inadequacies and instead accuse themselves of being selfish or greedy in relation to their desires. As adults, people rationalize their habit of rationing or limiting themselves in an ever-widening range of situations and, as a result, become increasingly alienated from themselves as vital, feeling human beings.

ROLE OF THE VOICE IN RESTRICTING GOAL-DIRECTED BEHAVIOR

The "voice" exists as a pathological overlay on the personality and is active in relation to both kinds of guilt. It is an ongoing internal dialogue that runs down the self and incidentally is cynical and negative toward other individuals. Feelings of guilt, self-accusatory thoughts, self-limiting and self-destructive behavior are all controlled by this internal thought process.

The "voice" may be conceptualized as the language of one's guilt feelings and self-attack. It represents an external point of view toward the self initially derived from the parents' overt or covert hostile feelings toward the child. If, for example, a child was unwanted or was born at an inopportune

time, he might grow up believing that he is a *burden* to his parents, or might entertain fantasies of having been adopted, of not really belonging to his family. Later, such an individual would feel undeserving, that she had no rights, or might, on a deeper level, feel guilty for even being alive. In this case, as an adult, the voice would attack her derisively: "People don't really want you around," or, "You don't belong here – you're a misfit. People don't want to listen to you. You would never be chosen."

Self-critical thoughts of the voice are often direct replications of actual parental criticism. On the other hand, they also reflect the unspoken or suppressed hostile attitudes of the parents toward the child. Most children adopt their parents' particular style of ridicule and sarcasm as a global attitude toward themselves and generalize these self-attacks to many of their personality traits. Although people may subjectively feel, "I'm a bad person," this feeling is more accurately expressed as an external attack, e.g., "You're a bad person." "You're lazy!" "You never do anything right."

For example, one patient, a very reticent, inward young woman, had been raised in a family that she described as dominated by her mother's chronic alcoholism and subsequent neglect of her children. As a result, the subject was painfully shy, quiet, and extremely self-conscious. In one session, she revealed a voice that directed her to be unobtrusive and to remain in the background. In a subsequent session, she said she had been able to identify this voice as representing her mother's rejecting attitudes toward her:

I have never been aware of how she felt towards me as I was growing up, but I think as the result of that, that I'm quiet. I constantly act on the feelings that I have. I even thought that *I feel guilty for just being alive*. I thought it would be interesting to say more of that feeling. The feeling is:

[Here the patient verbalizes her self-critical thoughts in the second person, as though she were another person speaking to herself.]

"Just don't say anything! Look, just leave me alone! I don't care about you. (Angrily) Just stay away! Little Miss Priss! Just stay out of my life. I don't want you around. Who do you think you are? *I'm Daddy's little girl*, not you! Just stay out of my way! Just don't come around me trying to act cute. There's nothing cute about you. There's nothing pretty about you. . . ." (cries)

The young woman's symptoms had inhibited her natural expression and significantly constricted her life. Following the sessions where she verbalized her self-attacks and identified their origins, she experienced a sense of relief from guilt and became more outspoken and assertive. She also reported feeling a strong sense of identity for the first time in her life.

Another subject, an associate, recalled being told by his parents that he had nearly died during a long childhood illness. The boy's mother had confided in him that at one point his father had said he would kill himself if the boy died. According to an uncle, his parents were thrilled when the boy lived; however, the weeks of constant fear and concern had evidently taken their toll. The threat of loss had damaged their emotional involvement with their son, and they became more distant from the youngster. His parents' unconscious rejection of him affirmed his sense of being "bad" for being sick and causing his parents concern. Later, as an adult, whenever he became ill or sensed weakness in himself, he felt guilty and "bad." In some sense, the feelings of self-recrimination he felt for inadvertently causing his parents grief were extended and generalized to a guilty feeling for enjoying life. It was difficult for this man to maintain a sense of legitimacy, in spite of unusual achievement and dedication.

The voice is an abnormal or misguided form of self-protection or defense that acts to preserve an individual's negative self-concept and psychological equilibrium at the expense of his development. To a great extent, people talk themselves out of pursuing goals that are important to them based on these misconceptions of themselves: "Why try, you'll probably fail," or "Don't show that it matters to you because you'll never get it anyway," or "You'll never amount to anything."

Guilt about moving in a direction that is different from, or more fulfilling than in one's family, is often expressed by the voice in the following terms: "Who do you think you are?" "You always want your own way!" "You only think of yourself."

In one case, a man verbalized a series of self-attacks representing guilty reactions he experienced relating to important new friendships he was developing. As he talked, his voice assumed a snide, parental tone, which he identified as sounding like his father's:

"What are you doing here with these people? What do you need these friends for? You don't need friends! All you need is us, your family. You always were a weird person. When you were a kid, you were so strange. You never wanted to be like us. You always wanted to be different. Who do you think you are?"

The key dynamic in this case concerned the subject's guilt about his movement away from the family and its problems. Achieving more financial success, developing friendships, and choosing to live life more fully than the members of his family gave rise to a considerable amount of anxiety and led to feelings of remorse and self-reproach.

Many people suffer intense feelings of guilt about leaving others behind and succeeding where others close to them have failed, and these successes

arouse strong voice attacks. Indeed, voice attacks are often intensified following a significant success or achievement of a personal goal. For instance, the voice may warn the successful person that he won't be able to sustain or repeat his performance. Insinuations that the actual accomplishment was a quirk of fate or that it was the result of others being deceived are common. This aspect of the voice contributes to the empty feeling that many people notice after they achieve an unusual success.

By distorting and ridiculing a child's desires, parents and, later, the incorporated "voice" effectively stop the child from expressing genuine responses that would otherwise be a natural part of personal interactions. Consequently, children often become self-conscious whenever they feel like acting spontaneously, with freedom or abandonment. The voice warns them as adults just as their parents cautioned them as children: "Don't get so excited." "Don't make a fool of yourself." These thoughts have a constraining influence on active strivings and spirited behavior, thereby diminishing a person's vitality and dulling his affect.

The process of listening to the voice predisposes behavior that leads to the avoidance of other people and therefore to the breakdown of relationships. The voice is critical of others as well as the self; both attacks alienate the person from others and foster an isolated, inward life style. The voice, operating as an attack on others, is the basis for paranoid thoughts and the maladaptive actions based on them. For example, the voice may caution: "Don't get involved with her; she's cold and rejecting," or "You can't trust men," or "Why would you want friends? You know that people are phony and superficial." These negative thoughts are at the core of paranoid suspicion, distrust, and self-fulfilling prophecies of rejection.

The voice acts to direct self-denying and self-destructive behavior, then ironically attacks the person for following its dictates. As such, it plays a part in both types of guilt. For example, dieters who are "listening" to the voice alternately tempt themselves to indulge in overeating, then perversely, punish themselves viciously for yielding to temptation. Feelings of hopelessness and pessimism and a continual expectation of failure result from the demoralization that follows actions based on the "voice." Unchallenged, this type of thought process can lead to serious consequences.

THE VOICE AND EXISTENTIAL GUILT

A person may feel consciously guilty for not pleasing authorities, while unconsciously he feels guilty for not living up to his own expectations of himself. (Erich Fromm, 1947, p. 169)

We have consistently found that whenever our subjects submitted to

guilt reactions and regressed, they generally "heard" voices telling them that they were no different from their family. For example, one man became deeply concerned that his five-year-old daughter might feel rejected or deprived of his affection and interest. Whenever he noticed her unhappiness or felt distant from her, he tortured himself with thoughts such as:

"See, you thought you were going to be different. Well, look at your kids. There's the proof! You're no different! What made you think you could be different? You can't change it. You're a failure. You're rotten all the way through."

Rather than serving as a "constructive guide," this man's guilt and remorse, as expressed in the form of the voice, only served to further demoralize him and actually *prevented* him from feeling compassionate toward himself and his children. Self-critical thoughts reminding people that they are no different from their parents have been reported by many individuals as significant factors in their acting against their own interests.

People feel strong guilt feelings when they act in a manner that goes against their stated goals and real preferences. They are basically depriving of themselves when they are opposed to their own point of view, but in addition, they feel bad about hurting others who depend upon their love. A number of subjects reported increased feelings of self-hatred and guilt reactions whenever they withheld affection and became alienated from close friends or marriage partners. They not only castigated themselves for losing the relationship or damaging it: "See, now you have no friends"; or, "She will never want you back." They also felt remorseful and self-hating about hurting the other person: "You really made him feel terrible; you have such a bad effect on people." This form of voice attack is characteristic of people who are self-denying or who limit their involvement in close relationships by holding back positive emotional responses. On some level, they are troubled by deep-seated guilt feelings and frequently try to compensate for their cutting off of genuine feeling by substituting role-determined responses.

MANIFESTATIONS OF GUILT IN SCHIZOPHRENIA

The end result of a pathological process of regression and self-destructive behavior, followed by remorse, existential guilt, and increased self-hatred, can be observed in the auditory hallucinations of schizophrenic patients, where the patient actually hears "voices" as distinct from him or herself. In these cases, the voices continually direct, reprimand, and punish the patient in the form of parental injunctions. Furthermore, the voices attack him for giving in to self-destructive impulses, thereby compounding the problem.

Manifestations of guilt in schizophrenic patients reach significant proportions whenever there is progress in therapy. Paradoxically, guilt reactions are also severe when there is regression and acting out of self-destructive behavior. M. Sechehaye's (1951) classic analysis of Renee, a regressed schizophrenic girl, clearly illustrates both types of guilt. We are indebted to Sechehaye for her appreciation of the regressed patient's inability to accept gratification in reality and her recognition of Renee's need for substitute or alternative gratification in the form of symbolic realization.

Because of early childhood deprivation, Renee had turned to fantasy for gratification. The rationalize underlying Sechehaye's method of feeding her patient apples (Renee's personal symbol for maternal milk) is pertinent to our discussion:

While Renee had returned to the oral phase, she would have been angry to receive real milk, and that would have made her more ill. It was necessary for her to receive a symbol and not a reality. Why? *Because guilt feelings make it necessary to camouflage the repressed desire.* Once the guilt feelings have been calmed (in this case, by having appeased the legitimate desire), one can accept reality. (p. 52) [italics added]

By offering only symbolic or fantasy gratification, Sechehaye was able to counter the patient's profound feelings of guilt. She was able to "wean" Renee gradually to actual satisfactions and the simple pleasures of reality.

Both M. Sechehaye and Renee herself, in writing about her illness (*Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl*, 1951), pointed out that the "flight into madness" was torturous because tremendous feelings of guilt and self-destructive impulses were aroused when regression took place. In the course of treatment, when Renee submitted to self-destructive impulses or retreated further into autism, there were strong guilt reactions. The voices instructed Renee over and over again to hurt herself, and it required all her strength to resist. Yet when she gave in to these voices and acted out physical abuse on herself, they became even more intense and derisive.

As she retreated into autism, Renee's guilty reactions focused on three principal themes: (1) the existential guilt of self-betrayal; (2) betrayal of the people who loved her and wished her well, most particularly the therapist who was attempting to help her; and (3) guilt about becoming progressively less functional and thereby presenting a burden to others. Her voices played a part in all of the above reactions of guilt.

The analogy to neurotic behavior and the seemingly perverse actions of many normal individuals is clear. People far less disturbed than Renee also feel guilty about pursuing goals directly. Like Renee, they appear to prefer fantasy gratification to fulfilling their wants in reality. Yet as they choose

fantasy, passivity, and self-nourishing life styles, they feel existential guilt. For example, people who give up genuine caring and real interest in their mates for role-playing and a fantasy of love (a bond) experience considerable suffering and remorse.

As individuals retreat from pursuing life fully, they feel guilty of self-betrayal and, incidentally, betrayal of their loved ones as well. Indeed, many couple disputes are triggered by concern about the self-destructive impulses and actions of one's marital partner. Fear and worry about the other unfortunately lead to intrusive behavior and aggressive interference, which further damages the relationship. As is the case in more serious pathology, whenever people become withholding and less adaptive in their overall functioning, they feel guilty about their failures. Any behavior that leads to unnecessary withdrawal and increased dependency intensifies this process. Furthermore, in their attempts to cover up their withdrawal and withholding toward a love object, most people act as if they are still pursuing satisfying relationships and personal goals, and, as a result, their communications become duplicitous. This lack of integrity further intensifies their guilt.

GUILT AND DEATH ANXIETY

In a deep sense, people feel afraid to live fully in the face of their ultimate fate or to give value to a life which they know they eventually must lose. They are reluctant to become too attached to other people or to allow others to become close to them because of the pain and grief involved in potential separation. They often feel guilty and fearful about enjoying physical pleasure because they wish to remain unaware of being connected to, or trapped in, a body that will die someday. In that sense, their guilt may be an attempt to disown their physical nature because of its obvious impermanence.

A form of guilt closely related to separation and death anxiety is "death guilt," described by Robert Lifton and Eric Olson in their paper, "The Human Meaning of Total Disaster" (1976). They define death guilt as "the survivor's sense of painful self-condemnation over having lived while others died" (p. 3). Interviewing survivors from the Buffalo Creek flood of 1972, Lifton and Olson determined that:

People who have gone through this kind of experience are never quite able to forgive themselves for having survived. Another side of them, however, experiences relief and gratitude that it was *they* who had the good fortune to survive in contrast to the fate of those [many of whom were close relatives] who died—a universal and all-too-human survivor reaction that in turn intensifies their guilt. (p. 5)

Lifton and Olson's concept of "death guilt" coincides with the descriptions of "survival guilt" related by those individuals who were incarcerated in concentration camps and survived the trauma. Elsewhere, Lifton and Olson (1974) relate survivor guilt indirectly to death anxiety and the individual's attempt to cope with the kinds of experiences where this anxiety is aroused. Lifton and Olson (1976) believe that when an individual suppresses these painful feelings of guilt, the result is a kind of "*psychic numbing*—a diminished capacity for feeling of all kinds—in the form of various manifestations of apathy, withdrawal, depression, and overall constriction in living" (p. 5).

In our terms, the survivor in this situation undoubtedly possesses a questioning, sneering, accusatory voice—"Why did *you* survive while others died?" Or, "Did you *really* deserve to live?"—as part of an unrelenting guilt reaction.

William Styron's novel, *Sophie's Choice* (1979), graphically portrays this form of self-blame and the painful self-accusations associated with "survivor guilt." After choosing to save her son by sacrificing her daughter in order to avert death for both her children at the hands of the SS guards, Sophie was tormented by guilt for surviving her ordeal. Basically her terrible choice involved choosing life for herself, for which she was never able to forgive herself. Later, her lover, Nathan, became a tool in her own self-destruction. His accusations and questions about the methods she employed that allowed her to survive—"How did *you* escape?"—echoed Sophie's own self-condemnations. In a sense, she projected her voice onto Nathan and used him to punish herself. In her own eyes, the punishment was not severe enough to equal her crime—that of being alive, and Sophie ended her life by submitting to Nathan's psychotic plan for them to die together.

To feel one's guilt about surviving, simply living, or valuing one's life is painful. For this reason, it typically is repressed, surfacing at times as feelings of self-consciousness or in apologetic gestures toward others who are less fortunate (Firestone, 1985). People who restrict their lives experience boredom, a sense of emptiness, and feelings of existential guilt; however, they *do* minimize or avoid painful feelings associated with death anxiety that would follow from investing in a full life. Many individuals are willing to pay the price of living a defended, self-hating existence and choose an emotionally deadened, self-limiting life style.

Indeed, a common response to "survival guilt" and death anxiety is to renounce the very activities and relationships that give one's life the most value. The author (1985) has described this form of progressive self-denial as an accommodation to death and a defense against death anxiety:

We attempt to gain control over death through a process of progressive self-denial; that is, we deny ourselves experiences that would enhance our lives and give them value. . . . In withdrawing feeling or affect from personal pursuits and goal-directed activity, [we reduce our] vulnerability to hurt, rejection or loss. (p. 256)

This process, which is suicidal in nature, diminishes the guilt about choosing life, yet it inevitably leads to the second type of guilt, existential guilt, of which Becker (1973) has written: "Guilt results from unused life, from 'the un-lived in us' " (p. 180). This guilt, in turn, is responsible for people's acting out destructive impulses in a desperate attempt to atone for acts of *omission*—in effect, to punish themselves for their withdrawal from life.

VOICE THERAPY

To contend with the process of progressive self-limitation, the author has developed a technique of psychotherapy called *voice therapy*. Voice therapy employs methods that bring these negative thoughts and attitudes more into the patient's awareness. The process of formulating and verbalizing these patterns of thoughts acts to lessen the destructive effect of the voice on the patient's behavior. Utilizing our technique, specific self-attacks are isolated and externalized by stating them to the self as though they were coming from an outside source. For example, when self-criticisms are spoken aloud in this manner (as illustrated in the clinical material documented in an earlier section), they are said in the second person, e.g., "You're no good," rather than in the first person, e.g., "I'm no good." Previously the patient took this process for granted, implicitly believed his or her own negative self-evaluations, and was unable to separate them out from a realistic self-appraisal.

The vocalization of one's self-attacks through this therapeutic procedure evokes feelings of compassion and support for the self and for one's own point of view. Once formulated, self-accusations can be effectively evaluated and countered. The patient replaces maladaptive actions based on the dictates of the voice with more constructive behavior. In contrast, when the process of voice attacks is *not* interrupted, a person increasingly submits to the injunctions of the voice and progressively abandons his real self and unique point of view.

Voice therapy addresses defenses and reactions that are closely connected with the core of pain and suffering in human experience. It is easily understood and assimilated by the patient. Insights and conclusions are arrived at spontaneously rather than being introduced by the therapist. As such, it stimulates independence and support for one's individuality.

CONCLUSIONS

The range of an individual's experience is defined by the boundaries imposed by neurotic guilt on the one hand and existential guilt on the other--and by the thought process that mediates guilt, the voice. However, by identifying this voice and making it conscious, people can progress and cope more successfully with their self-limiting and self-destructive tendencies. Voice therapy is a new technique of psychotherapy that helps patients expose and challenge this destructive thought process. Patients gradually learn that despite their weaknesses, faults, or mistakes, the process of attacking the self is never appropriate; indeed, it is always maladaptive.

In our present state of knowledge, we feel that this technique helps patients isolate and become conscious of the dual nature of their guilt feelings. It is our opinion that voice therapy is an effective therapeutic procedure and valuable research tool in understanding the relationship and structure of *neurotic* and *existential* guilt. In challenging the voice in voice therapy, one becomes freer to pursue one's life, thereby minimizing regressive trends and the complicated guilt feelings associated with self-betrayal.

NOTES

1. The term "bond" refers to an illusion of being connected to another person, originally a fantasized connection to the mother formed by the infant to compensate for deprivation. Later this pathological connection and dependency is extended to new objects. For clarity its usage here must be clearly distinguished from its popular meaning, i.e., a positive bond of love, loyalty, and closeness or the positive attachment in parent-infant bonding (Firestone, 1984).

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