GUILT, SHAME, AND OTHER REACTIVE MOTIVES

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IT is now generally recognized that neuroses are reactions to unconscious conflicts. In order to understand an unconscious conflict we should distinguish two kinds of motives—a "disturbing motive," which has usually been repressed, and a "reactive motive," which is responsible for the disturbing motive's having been repressed.

Psychoanalysts were at first interested chiefly in disturbing motives. The patient's struggle to keep these disturbing motives repressed was usually called "resistance," but the motives for resistance were often not carefully analyzed. Sometimes resistance was attributed to a psychic "censor," but little attempt was made to analyze the "reactive" motives that had inspired the censorship.

Still, in order to understand a neurosis or a patient's personality structure, we should know both of the motives that are involved in an underlying conflict. When we are interested in the functioning of the personality as a whole, *the motives that inspire the censorship are just as important* to discover *as the motives that are repressed.* We should try to find out not only the patient's disturbing motive but also the "reactive motive" that has caused him to repress, or to inhibit, or to try to explain away his "disturbing motive."

In this paper I shall try to distinguish a number of

different kinds of reactive motives. Since Freud published *The Ego and the Id,* psychoanalysts have been much interested in reactions to guilt, but the word "guilt" is often used loosely to include many other kinds of reactions. For example, guilt should be distinguished from fear of loss of a parent's love, from fear of punishment, and from shame.

As a basis for understanding the distinction between guilt and fear of loss of love we recapitulate Freud's two successive attempts to explain how the conscience is formed in the course of a child's development. The first of Freud's reconstructions was part of his elaboration of the concept of narcissism. One form of infantile narcissism is a kind of megalomania: the infant likes to imagine himself omnipotent and perfect. Yet his actual helplessness and the criticisms of his parents make it impossible for him to maintain this illusion. He protects himself from disillusionment by attributing the wished-for perfection to an Ego-ideal. The conscience arises as a need to achieve this ideal in reality.

Later, supplementing this account, Freud (1923) derived the conscience from the child's attempts to resolve the Oedipus complex. In the Oedipus complex the little boy's ambition to be powerful like the father fuses with his desire to possess the mother sexually. Thwarted in this desire by his fear of castration by the father, he is driven to seek another way of identifying with the father's power. He achieves this goal by imposing on himself the father's prohibitions, threats, and punishments. The part of the personality that splits off thus to identify with the father's prohibitive

role is the conscience or Superego. Sometimes we describe this process by saying that the Superego arises by "introjection" of the father's prohibitive role.

The inverted Oedipus complex also contributes to the formation of the Superego, since the little boy is thwarted also in his desire to be loved sexually by the father. When the Superego takes over the father's role, submitting to the restraints and punishments imposed by the Superego can serve as a substitute for gratification of the boy's feminine desire to submit to the father.

Guilt and Fear of Loss of Love. By means of this reconstruction we can now distinguish between guilt and fear of loss of a parent's love. In an early paper (1928), Anna Freud insisted on the importance of this distinction as a basis for understanding the differences between child analysis and the analysis of adult patients. She called attention to the fact that the child's Superego can usually not be counted on to inhibit disturbing impulses unless it is supported by prohibitions from the parents or from the analyst. In children the process of introjecting parental prohibitions has usually not been completed; and the prohibitions imposed by the Superego must therefore be re-enforced either by fear of punishment or by fear of loss of the parents' love.

The same distinction between guilt and fear of loss of love as reactive motives is also important sometimes in order to understand adult patients. In these patients, too, the process of introjection of parental inhibitions has been incomplete; and fear of loss of love is often

the dominant inhibitory motive, supplementing or even replacing guilt. This distinction may be important in determining what symptom a patient will develop at a particular time. For example, in our studies (1941) of bronchial asthma at the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute, we found that asthma attacks are precipitated only by situations in which fear of estrangement (or separation) from a mother figure is the inhibiting motive. During periods when introjection of parental prohibitions was more successful, the patients developed other symptoms, such as neurotic compulsions, but were free of asthma. In other words, at such time the patient's conscience, which caused him to condemn himself, served as a kind of buffer, protecting him from the danger of offending a mother figure, which might otherwise have precipitated an asthma attack.

Guilt and Inferiority Feelings. Another distinction that is important for understanding the behavior of patients is the distinction between guilt and feelings of inferiority or shame. Alexander (1935) pointed out, for example, that feelings of inferiority on account of strong dependent needs are often reacted to with aggressive criminal behavior; the criminal is trying to prove that he is not soft but tough. Later (1938), Alexander called attention to the fact that such feelings of inferiority often come into direct conflict with guilt feelings. In inhibited and compulsive characters this alternation between guilt and feelings of inferiority may be exceedingly disabling. The patient's guilt inhibits the patient's aggressive impulses and subdues

a man into submissive attitudes, but his pride will not permit him to accept his submissive attitudes, and gives rise to feelings of inferiority, which tend to drive him again into aggressive behavior.

More recently, Piers (1953) has elaborated this contrast further, insisting on the distinction between guilt and shame. The word "shame," which he uses in a somewhat broader sense than usual, corresponds to Alexander's "feelings of inferiority." Piers finds the essential difference between guilt and shame in the fact that guilt inhibits and condemns transgression whereas shame demands achievement of a positive goal. He relates this contrast between shame and guilt to Freud's two earlier terms for the conscience. Shame, when its goal is positive achievement, he thinks of as a reaction to the Ego ideal; whereas guilt, he believes, proceeds from the Superego.

Further Classification of Reactive Motives. The distinctions between guilt and fear of loss of love and between guilt and inferiority feelings do not anywhere near exhaust the possible variations in a patient's reactive motives. Indeed, each of the kinds of reactive motive that we have enumerated should be classified further into subgroups.

An important distinction is one between the negative and positive goals of a reactive motive. For example, feelings of inferiority and shame are uncomfortable or disturbing feelings of which a person tries to rid himself by compensatory behavior. Therefore, we call them negative goals (i.e., goals to be avoided); but ambition and pride in achievement are positive

goals. Similarly, hopes of winning a parent's love or of reconciliation with a parent are positive goals, which we contrast with fear of estrangement or fear of loss of love. Desires to justify oneself should similarly be contrasted with guilt feelings.

Another distinction that is important has to do with the realistic or unrealistic character of reactive behavior and with its effectiveness in achieving its positive goals. A Demosthenes or a Hannibal compensates for inferiority feelings by a lifelong ambition culminating in supreme achievement, whereas another man's compensation may consist only in idle boasting or in daydreams of being a great man.

Three Kinds of Pride. We often think of pride as satisfaction in being admired by others, which psychoanalysts usually regard as a form of exhibitionism; but pride as a reactive motive probably takes its origin in more elementary urges toward active mastery, which are independent of any concern about being observed. We shall group such reactions together under the concept of "presocial pride."

Presocial Pride. The stimulus for such reactions may be fear, or the memory or fear of helplessness in the face of strong desire, or the threat of an obstacle interfering with a goal-directed striving. The reaction is increased effort in response to an obstacle, or, if the stimulus is fear, there may be a counter-phobic braving of the danger. The essential satisfaction of this kind of pride can be translated into the words "I can." It is a pride in self-assertion, power, or achievement.

A child will often react with a kind of triumphant delight when he first learns to stand or walk or to climb stairs. One child of my acquaintance, when he first succeeded in standing up to hold on to the side of his play pen, remained in this position until he fell asleep. Then he fell back on his pillow. He immediately climbed up again as soon as he woke up, and repeated this performance all day and all night until his parents became alarmed at his loss of sleep. His delight in his achievement was quite independent of any encouragement he received from his parents—since he had received none.

Such reactions to achievement or to the mastery of difficulties can be recognized not only in human beings but in animals as well. They probably are analogous to such physiological reactions as the compensatory hypertrophy of an overloaded heart, or to the development of callous in reaction to irritation of skin or bone. For example, a dog may first run with its tail between its legs when threatened by another dog; but then, detecting some sign of fear in the other dog, will turn and give chase with its tail high in the air! Or a cat will sit motionless, keeping watch over a captured mouse, only to pounce upon it when the mouse gives the least sign of trying to get away. Does the cat derive any satisfaction from thus teasing the mouse? If it were human we would suspect that it is gloating in its power over its helpless prey.

In later life pride in achievement is the motive that most facilitates learning and constructive efforts. On the other hand, in our patients we can observe how the inhibition of aggressive impulses will often give rise

to intense feelings of inferiority, because inhibition of aggression makes a person feel weak.

"Exhibitionistic" Pride—Pride in Being Admired or Approved. We must suspect that pride in self-assertion, power, and achievement is based on an inherited mechanism; but other kinds of pride are more or less deliberately inculcated in the child by parents and teachers, by the peer group, and by society at large. Very early, the child develops desires to call attention to himself, to be admired, and to be praised; and feelings of inferiority or shame begin to appear whenever he is seen in an unfavorable light. On account of the fact that society values a number of different kinds of behavior, such socially oriented pride may take any one of a number of different forms.

1. Aggressive efforts to overcome difficulties and to brave danger are important for the survival of the community as a whole. Therefore, the community tends to idealize toughness and boldness and to give honor to the virtues of courage and bravery; and the child's pride in aggressive behavior and achievement tends to be supplemented by pride in exhibiting his prowess or skill to others.

2. On the other hand, the parents and society in general demand compliance from all, and especially from children and women. To this demand the individual may respond by wishes to be approved for being good. On the other hand, the desire to be good may come into conflict with the ambition to be tough; and, consequently, a man may be despised as a weakling if he is too compliant.

3. The criteria for sexual attractiveness are related in somewhat complex ways, which differ for the two sexes, to the two codes of behavior that we have just mentioned. In men, aggressiveness tends to enhance sexual attraction, and being too good or compliant to detract from it. On the other hand, in women, aggressiveness tends to detract from sexual attractiveness except when it can be used provocatively in order to provoke aggression from the male. Moreover, a woman must draw the line with considerable subtlety between being too good and being too seductive.

4. The word "shame" is used in both a general and a more specific sense. As we have already mentioned, Piers (1953) uses the word in its more general sense as equivalent to feelings of inferiority of any kind. In its narrower, more specific sense, it is a *reaction to being seen* by others in an unfavorable light.

Two kinds of experiences are particularly likely to give rise to such feelings of shame (in the narrower sense). One is an experience which almost every child undergoes at some time. At first, the infant is admired for showing himself without clothes to his elders; but then, one day, the elders suddenly hold him up to shame for showing himself in the very way that had previously provoked so much admiration.

Experiences of this kind probably account for the very close association of shame and exhibitionism, to which psychoanalysis has called attention.

The other situation which can activate intense shame is one of betraying erotic feelings toward another person and receiving either no response or a negative response from the object of one's affection.

Such an experience might be compared to taking off one's armour (as an expression of trust and affection) and then discovering that the person to whom one has exposed one's self is really an enemy.

Development of Ego Ideals. We already quoted Freud's concept of the development of the Superego by introjection of parental prohibitions. By a similar process of internalization, the standards according to which a person expects to be judged by the family or by society at large may be incorporated into his own personality and may become an ego ideal by which he judges himself. If then, in the course of time, the standards of society change, or if the individual moves into a new society, he may cling loyally to his own introjected ideals and standards even though they may now conflict with those of the society in which he lives.

Different Kinds of Behavior Inspired by Need for Love. The need for love or fear of loss of love may also result in a number of different kinds of behavior.

Sometimes a person develops patterns based on realistic efforts to win the love of parents and others. The simplest pattern of this kind is one of winning parental approval by being good, by compliance with the consciously expressed moral demands of the parents. Others, during childhood, are not concerned so much with what the parents teach that they should do, but learn rather how to please the parents as persons. Later, such a person may find it very important always to make himself (or herself) pleasing to other people but not necessarily by being good or complying with

the demands of society as a whole. In still other cases, a child may become very skillful in adapting to the weaknesses and peculiarities of the parents and others, and in exploiting the weaknesses of others to his own ends, in adroit defiance of the standards of society.

In the past thirty years the psychoanalytic literature has had a great deal to say about the need for punishment, which is usually thought of as a manifestation of a conscious or unconscious sense of guilt. However, such needs for punishment can often be recognized in the child long before there has been introjection of parental prohibitions. The basic mechanism starts with the child's realization or fear that he has offended the parent. To this realization the child then reacts with a hope of reconciliation with the parent by accepting or even provoking punishment. This hope is usually a realistic one, since parents are often willing to accept a child back into their good graces after they have inflicted punishment on him.

Another reaction pattern, which is often confused with a need for punishment and attributed to guilt, is based, I believe, on a much more elementary mechanism. This is the mechanism which I shall call "simple reversal of aggression." By this I mean the mechanism in which an aggressive impulse is turned back against the aggressor in its original form, in which an aggressive impulse is inhibited and then replaced by the fear or wish that someone will do to the aggressor what he originally wished to do to his victim.

A moment ago, we pointed out that a child's hope of reconciliation by means of punishment is a realistic one, based on the actual behavior of parents. But in

the mechanism of "simple reversal of aggression" the patient's expectation of being attacked or hurt is not based on any remembered real experience of punishment from a parent. On the contrary, the form of the aggression expected from someone else reproduces the form of the patient's own original aggressive impulse. To account for this reversal we need only assume that *fear of estrangement* from the parent has first caused the original aggressive impulse to be inhibited; and then—because this aggressive impulse must still seek some kind of outlet even after it has been inhibited—it is turned back against the patient himself.

Transition to True Guilt Reactions. The transition from behavior motivated by fear of loss of love to true guilt reactions involves at least two steps.

In the first step, the authority of the parents is replaced in part by acceptance of certain generalized ethical principles that are valid for others as well as for the child himself; and the unconditional desire for the love and approval of parental figures is replaced by a need for self-justification. For example, at a certain stage in ethical development, a child will often use the parent's own words to pass judgment on brothers and sisters, or even on the parents themselves. When an ethical rule has once been accepted by a child it can be thrown into the balance to help justify the child in a controversy between the child and someone else.

But when a child has learned to use an ethical rule to justify himself, the child has not yet developed a conscience. The child can be said to have a conscience only when he has begun to turn the rule back against

himself to condemn himself. Then his conscience may stir up in him need for punishment that is independent of the more personal desire to win reconciliation with a parental figure.

Analysis of the Censorship in a Dream. Having now sketched out how reactive motives can be classified, we ask next how one can determine, by analysis of a patient's behavior, what reactive motives have been responsible for his inhibition, repression, or other reaction to a disturbing motive.

One particularly good way to investigate reactive motives is to try to find out what has motivated the censorship in dreams.

In the manifest content of dreams, the latent dream thoughts seem to have undergone distortion. Freud (1900) attributed this distortion to a dream censor. Like a political censor, Freud believed, the dream censor finds certain thoughts unacceptable and excludes them from consciousness. Other thoughts the censor permits to enter consciousness, provided that they first submit to distortion; they are permitted to enter consciousness in disguised form.

Now, in order to study the dreamer's reactive motives, we attempt to analyze the dream censorship:

Let us suppose that we have already discovered the disturbing dream wish. We ask next: Why did this wish have to be censored? What was the "reactive motive" that caused the dream censor to repudiate this particular wish? In order to determine this, we examine the manifest dream and ask how the dreamer has reacted to the disturbing dream wish. For example, if

the patient is reacting with feelings of inferiority to an intense dependent wish, in the manifest content we may find him boasting of his independent achievements. If he is reacting with guilt to a hostile impulse the manifest content may picture him as being condemned and submitting to punishment. If the dreamer is reacting with fear of estrangement the manifest content may picture him as seeking reconciliation with a parental figure. The following rather unusually simple example will illustrate how we proceed.

In his first analytic hour, a patient had told of telling both his father and his wife about a current extramarital relationship. The analyst asked why he had done so. In response to this stimulus, the patient that night dreamed as follows:

> "I found myself helpless, unable to use arms and legs and being tortured by two individuals. I promised them that I wouldn't hurt anybody even if I didn't like them. The two individuals seemed to be my father and my brother. I struggled and tried to bite."

Even from the text of this dream it is evident that it is motivated by the patient's need to justify himself. He has reacted to the analyst's question of the preceding hour as though it were an accusation to the effect that his telling his father and his wife were motivated by a desire to hurt them. In the dream text he has pictured a situation in which he would be justified in trying to hurt someone. Being tortured by his father and brother would be ample justification for struggling and trying to bite. Moreover, his promise "that he wouldn't hurt anybody even if he didn't like them" is

a protestation of innocence that should still further justify him.

However, the desire to justify himself does not fully account for the manifest dream. The fact that he is unable to use his arms and legs and that, instead of hurting someone, he is being tortured points to an intense reaction formation to his hostile impulses, giving rise first to motor paralysis and then to the turning back of aggression against himself. To account for these two successive reaction formations we must probably postulate guilt as a reactive motive.

Now, putting together these two bits of evidence we can reconstruct the genesis of this dream as follows: The analyst's question stirred up the patient's guilt on account of his desire to hurt both his father and his wife. The dream text implies that he wanted to hurt them not only indirectly by his confession but also by attacking them physically. In the dream work he first reacted to his guilt by a fantasy of paralysis of his arms and legs, and next by one of being tortured. Then, as a second step, he utilized this fantasy of being tortured to justify himself and even to give him an excuse for biting.

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