

# The Structure of Neurosis

A. Levitsky, Ph. D.

March 1984

## I. Parental rejection leads to feelings of unworthiness, poor self-image.

The mechanism:

- A. The infant mind seems to work this way: they are treating me badly; I must be bad.
- B. The sequence:
  1. They are bad to me
  2. I'm angry
  3. They say it's bad to be angry
  4. I repress it; I have a guilty secret
  5. I'm guilty; I'm bad; I should be punished

## II. Introjection and self-aggression

- A. Parental love is the lifeline to survival
- B. But (in neurotic structures) it is accompanied by rejection
- C. Love and rejection pain are fused and confused
- D. Manifestations are numerous:
  1. Seeking love thru pain
  2. Inability to tolerate success
  3. Fear of intimacy: if they know me, they'll know I'm bad
  4. Inability to receive: I don't deserve it.  
Etc., etc.
- E. The formulation: if you're treated lovingly, you introject the love and treat yourself and others lovingly; if you're treated with rejection, you introject and treat yourself and others with rejection.

## III. Rigidity of the structure: why is it so hard to modify?

(We observe that reassurance, success, love, admiration rarely does the trick—e.g., the Marilyn Monroe syndrome).

- A. Rejection prevents resolution of dependent needs
- B. Dependency contradicts self-acceptance
- C. Self-acceptance would involve facing the very problem which is so terrifying; i.e.,
  - getting rid of the parental introject
  - becoming one's own authority
  - emotionally leaving home (growing up)
- D. Hence, Paul Tillich's *The Courage To Be* or *The Courses of Self-Love*

## IV. The repetition compulsion; the dynamics of self-perpetuation

- A. The original rejection
- B. Paradoxically this creates the need to repeat the original rejection. Why?
- C. The mechanism of externalization. (A variant of projection)
- D. Why externalization? To avoid the pain of recognition that one does this to one's self. Why?
- E. Self-responsibility is too threatening:
  1. It involves being one's own authority
  2. With harsh super-ego one has not learned the distinction between responsibility and self-blame.
- F. The distinction: self-responsibility does not involve self-punishment.

Mature super-ego = self-accepting self-criticism or self-criticism minus self-punishment

## V. Actualization guilt (rational guilt) and neurotic structure

Sequence:

1. Early rejection leads to anxiety and negative self-image.
2. Non-growth motivation; i.e., oriented more towards security than towards growth.
3. But growth motivation is biological; a life force.
4. At some level individual is aware of non-growth motivations; i.e., efforts to avoid existential anxiety, to avoid life.
5. This is neurotic anxiety: the effort to avoid existential anxiety.  
Neurotic anxiety xxx = fear of fully living.
6. Knowing this (consciously or unconsciously), one feels guilt which I call actualization or rational guilt.  
Definition: Actualization guilt is what one feels towards oneself (as well as towards others) because he senses that he has not developed optimally. It is the work of an entity which I postulate and which I call the Intuitive Rational Superego. (IRSE)
7. It is this guilt which is so hard to bear that it is displaced to neurotic guilt and poor self-image.

Thus, the experience "I am afraid to take the risks of life, love, work" is transmuted to "I am unlovable, unattractive, etc."