

The Chronic Depressive Character (Genital Revenge Blocked by Oral Inhibition)

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The chronic depressive is phallic with an oral repressed block. 1 He has all the basic qualities of the phallic, colored by the degree to which the oral block is effective. When the oral block is very powerful, phallic qualities are given up entirely and depression becomes the dominant feature. His ego, which is always weak, is caught between the punitive superego and the demanding goal of the ego ideal, usually a phallic image. Chronic depressives seem to be prone to developing skin cancer.

Characteristics and Symptoms

This is one of the least understood of the character types and one of the most frequently diagnosed incorrectly. Chronic depression has been called anxiety, phobia, compulsive, and even schizophrenia. From the symptoms one can understand this confusion.

The depressive is caught between oral repression and phallic narcissism. The drag back from the oral block may reactivate many compulsive features, as well as others which appear to be compulsive but really are not. For example, his rigid, righteous, usually moral, attitude may well make one think of the compulsive; actually, this is his method of expressing his phallic core, inhibited as he is by oral repression. His great inhibition makes overt aggression next to impossible.

He is easily distinguished from the compulsive, however, in that he is acutely sensitive, very much alive in his feelings but unable to show them. In the compulsive, heavy armor has created a dulling and anxiety is not as acute. Here, on the other hand, compulsive-like symptoms are usually in the form of phobias fraught with acute anxiety. Occasionally, typical compulsions may be present. 2 Unlike the compulsive, the chronic depressive is generous, not stingy, even though like the compulsive, he is frequently interested in collecting.

He may be mistaken for a schizophrenic because his timidity and modesty make him seem introverted, but a Rorschach will show he is extroverted. He is in a cage and cannot express himself, and is therefore considered cold and aloof. His independence is apt to accentuate such traits. His characteristics depend on the pull of the oral block; the greater the oral influence the more evident his depression becomes, while his phallic or compulsive traits become less evident.

In his best moments, he approaches a restrained phallic. Overtly, the depressive may seem well adjusted but his inner life is torment.

Depression ordinarily is not obvious, but seriousness is always present. When depression is marked there is a rapid lowering of energy, loss of weight, and shrinking. There is usually a history of depressive periods, and the patient reacts to disappointments with depression and self-blame. He is inclined to blame himself for most difficulties, while the usual phallic blames others. He is tolerant toward others but intolerant toward himself. He is righteous, determined, extremely responsible, and rigidly honest, possessing a strong, relentless drive even though his energy is usually below average. His lips are thin and his jaw is tight. He has little ability to defend himself aggressively as his own sense of guilt forces him to agree with his accuser. He is meticulous, orderly, and above average intelligence. In spite of his handicaps he usually gives a good account of himself but feels inadequate since his inhibitions prevent him from functioning anywhere near his capacity. It is the disparity between his achievement and his basic capacity that produces the feeling of inadequacy over which he feels much guilt.

Most depressives possess a rather good sense of humor, although it is inclined to be cynical or self-depreciating in type; and in speech they are often brief and caustic. Life itself is a trial, but their drive and great determination keep them going. Ideas of suicide are seldom out of their minds but they do not consider it seriously, except as a last resort. Sometimes they show hysteria-like manifestations in their desperation. The ultimate necessity for suicide seldom comes to them. Their critical ability is usually better developed than their creative ability, and life leaves them filled with bitterness, which may lead to gall bladder disease.

The depressive is well-meaning but is frequently misunderstanding because he expects others to understand with little explanation. He is usually a poor eater, fussy in what he eats, and gets little satisfaction from the oral zone. ³ He is inclined to be very temperate, but may overindulge in an attempt to break his chains (or at least appear to break them). He envies the phallic and longs for freedom from his restrictions, but cannot break through strong inner inhibitions. He has the strong sexual drive of the phallic, but is inhibited by moralism and concern for propriety, as well as by an inner feeling of inadequacy and a fear of being ridiculed by the woman. As children and adolescents, depressives are well behaved, quiet, idealistic, and sentimental. They prefer intellectual pursuits to sports or other physical activity. Lincoln, Mark Twain, and Hamlet are representative examples of the chronic depressive.

Genesis

The chronic depressive has reached the phallic stage with an oral inhibited block. The block is brought about by oral deprivation. The depressive does not give up the phallic level as the compulsive does, but tries desperately to cling to it. The phallic characteristics are more or less an ideal to be attained; this may account for the relentless drive of the depressive. Actually the depressive is forever trying to win the love and approval of the mother he always needs because of his early deprivation. Failure he always blames on himself with devastating guilt and goes to extraordinary lengths to succeed. He can accept any punishment rather than loss of love. He survives by being needed. He marries a mate who needs him. There is one point worthy of mention and that is the emotional advantage of depression. During depression anxiety usually disappears. His concern is thus directed outward rather than on himself and he thus feels more like an average person with a problem. Where the depression is not too deep potency is frequently improved because of replacement of the anxiety by the depression.

Therapy

In depression there is a rapid lowering of the energy level which is dangerous. The chest must be mobilized at once to build up energy, and the inhibited rage which has produced the depression must be released. It is difficult to maintain it. His drive, however, compensates and makes him a responsive and helpful patient. Nausea may be a prominent symptom; it is due to repressed crying, and is relieved when crying occurs.

Footnotes

- 1.** For a very excellent description of this character type and the manic depressive, which follows, see American Handbook of Psychiatry, 1959, Vol. 1, article on manic depressive psychoses by Arieti, pp. 419-452. Arieti does not, however, distinguish the chronic depressive as separate from the manic depressive, depressed, which I feel he should; so that in reading his article, which is well worth reading, one must select the material which belongs to this type from all the information he gives on the manic depressive, depressed. back to text
- 2.** Anal characteristics are activated by the drag back from the phallic to the oral level. back to text
- 3.** This is to be distinguished from those cases, usually hysterics, who defend themselves from oral pleasure, especially kissing, and react with disgust because of their rejection of sex. In these cases the mouth has become sexualized. back to text