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She is the author of three books in German and two in French, and was featured in two films on German television. She has also contributed chapters to various textbooks. She has written articles for the *Journal of Transactional Analysis* and other U.S. publications. She developed Existential Pattern Therapy, an approach that combines psychoanalytic concepts with Transactional Analysis and Gestalt. She has lectured and taught classes at the University of California-San Diego and U.C.-Berkeley, and receives honorariums worldwide.

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## Family Influences and Unconscious Drives: Motivators for Career Choices

by Fanita English

Nobody ever taught a normally developing child to walk. When sufficient physical development has taken place, a child will spontaneously stand, take some steps and walk, and later run and further experiment with jumping, climbing, and so on. What preceded walking were many efforts, from stretching helplessly to reach something or other, to ignominiously crawling and perhaps often being pulled away by a Major Power: - a caretaker. Yet, first steps, walking towards someone, and maybe even falling on the way and picking one's self up, are the beginning of active self-determination within the family environment, which represents the world. These first steps show that we can go for a chosen goal, though there may be obstacles and power struggles along the way. For instance, our family members may object to our reaching that goal. (Why did they take that lovely vase away just as I got to where I could pull it down?)

Similarly, no one ever taught a child to talk. We learned to talk, driven by the mysterious force that also motivated us to walk. But in the case of talking, beyond inchoate sounds that could or could not be understood and acted on by others, it is the early family environment that offers the actual words and sentences that a child can pick up. This environment enables us to learn the language spoken by those around us. Initial interaction between a child and his/her caretakers is non-verbal. Children can register non-verbal messages, like caresses or slaps, then smiles and frowns, all of which Transactional Analyst Eric Berne named "strokes." However, the particular language spoken in the family becomes our initial means for expressing ourselves verbally and exchanging symbolic strokes with others.

Human beings are social animals. Communication begins in the family. Berne showed that both verbal and non-verbal communication is based on exchanges of strokes, which he called "transactions." Early in life, children become accustomed to particular patterns of transactions with

their principal caretakers and family members. Later in life, we tend to want to duplicate such patterns with others whom we select for close relationships. On the job, we might try to get others to respond to us in the manner in which we were accustomed. The analogy would be to preferring “home cooked soup” to other food, even gourmet cuisine, and to seeking out all opportunities to be served such soup, or be disappointed when what we receive does not correspond to expectations based on childhood experience, regardless how tasty the “different” food might be.

For instance, two persons assigned to work together might experience mutual disappointment when their respective stroke exchanges do not result in the anticipated responses that correspond to their old internalized patterns. Each might firmly believe that it is the other person’s fault. Counselors can be helpful by analyzing and clarifying for both parties which patterns of transactions repeatedly cause hurt and misunderstanding. This allows both parties to understand “where the other is coming from.” When they understand these patterns, it is usually possible for both parties to come to some agreement (a “contract”) about how to cooperate more effectively at future tasks, even if neither gets the total satisfaction that would have come had they happened to find a co-worker with familiar patterns of transacting.

In addition to knowledge about resources and general psychological know-how, including familiarity with Transactional Analysis to facilitate communication, career counselors can familiarize themselves with the operation of three distinct drives that operate unconsciously within all of us and determine motivation in various ways. The following three drives - (a) Survival, (b) Expressive, and (c) Quiescence - operate early on to get a child to walk and talk, be “contrary” to some parental wishes, perhaps fight against being taken to bed, and then suddenly fall asleep right in the middle of the living room. These three drives continue to be influential throughout one’s life, singly or in combinations of two, at each stage of development. They are:

## **Survival, Expressive and Quiescence Drives**

### **1. The Survival Drive.**

This drive is first manifested by the infant’s ability to suck at the breast or bottle and signify pain, discomfort and fear, as well as the ability to register strokes for reassurance. Because of the Survival Drive, children intuitively realize that they cannot survive without help and must adapt to, or influence, caretakers. The child’s stroke transactions, first with his/her primary caretakers, then with others in the family, reflect this inner feeling. Eventually, as the child grows, these stroke transactions

evolve symbolically into preferred patterns for relating also outside the family, leading to the kind of preferences I referred to above as “home cooked soup.” Unfortunately, a child more accustomed to “negative” stroke transactions (blows, criticism, fighting) than to “positive” ones (gentleness, support, cooperation) is likely to prefer the former to the latter. If the child has not been helped to develop new patterns for relating, the Survival drive supports whatever patterns brought strokes during childhood. Even negative strokes meant receiving attention for existing, rather than being ignored like a piece of furniture. Later, even as grown-ups, certain people prefer being quarrelsome rather than cooperative.

### **Survival Conclusions**

Because of the Survival Drive, a child internalizes “survival conclusions” in response to caretakers’ strokes or shaming. The function of survival conclusions is to supplement survival instincts (that animals have to a greater degree than humans), and to generate appropriate fear or caution in certain situations. For instance the child learns not to lean over too far at an open window and to be careful of fire. Unfortunately, the same mechanism operates to generate fear or anxiety or inhibitions in connection with previous experiences of parental messages or behaviors. Such fear or anxiety may cease to be useful and can be damaging to the grown individual.

For instance, Tom, who had a benevolent new boss, became overly scared whenever this boss came into his office. Tom kept feeling an impulse to hide under his desk at such times. Why? This problem had not existed with his old boss. In consultation with his counselor, Tom realized that this new boss usually allowed the door to slam behind him whenever he walked into Tom’s office, even if it was to praise him. Hearing the door slam brought on a survival conclusion for Tom that he was in danger, and must hide. As a child, Tom had learned that whenever he heard the door to his house slam, his father had come home drunk and violent, and Tom must hide.

### **2. The Expressive Drive.**

The Expressive Drive manifests early on by squeals and funny sounds that attentive parents can usually distinguish from hunger cries even before the child starts to talk and walk. Later the influence of the Expressive Drive becomes evident when there is playfulness and risk-taking, such as climbing a tree “for no good reason,” as a parent might say. However, there is a reason: the Expressive Drive motivates such urges. Throughout life, this drive brings on excitement, and supports curiosity, fun, exploration, experimentation, courage and risk-taking, as well as imagination and sexuality. Ultimately,

this drive leads to discoveries, innovation, creativity, invention, and social change - though sometimes at the cost of the lives of the very individuals primarily motivated by it.

The motivating influence of the Expressive Drive may cooperate with the Survival Drive in some areas, such as learning to talk and walk, or being very excited by a project on the job. However, in many instances, there is an unconscious tug-of-war between the Survival and Expressive Drives. The Expressive Drive urges us to court danger in the service of self-expression, fun, sexuality and creativity, while the Survival Drive comes on with inhibitory stop signs at many crucial points. These conflicts become particularly evident at adolescence, as every harried parent will testify. Many of us have experienced choosing between a course of action which offered excitement, but danger, against another which seemed safe and probably more remunerative (in money or strokes), but was dull and boring. Such conflicts continue to reappear for all of us in major or minor ways on making choices and on using time, both at work and on other occasions.

### **3. The Quiescence Drive**

Lastly, this drive encourages us to "let go" of daily preoccupations, to meditate, or to sleep. The Quiescence Drive often intervenes helpfully when there is a conflict between the Survival and Expressive drives. Eventually the Quiescence Drive connects us with the universe, beyond our immediate environment. It supports appreciation of soothing music and of diverse forms of spirituality.

The Quiescence Drive might combine with the Survival Drive to help us relax, and thus improve our health, or it might combine with the Expressive Drive to foster imagination through dreams and fantasies. Quiescence may also lead to unrealistic passivity or denial in instances where Survival or Expressive might press for more involvement.

### **Drives Must Rotate**

In general, our drives take turns, or rotate, influencing our thoughts, feelings and behaviors, both in the course of life and on a daily basis. Frequently, two drives may cooperate to support a particular activity, with the third drive remaining in the background. Later, the third drive may emerge to the foreground, perhaps combine with one of the two operating so far. Then a different third drive recedes to the background. Thus, the emotional balance is maintained, even under changing circumstances.

In the example of a child learning to walk and talk, the primary strong motivating push comes from the Expressive Drive. Then the Survival drive must combine with the Expressive to support learning, such as

when a child transacts with family members, picks up their words, for instance, and obtains their strokes for such achievements. Eventually fatigue sets in as the Quiescence Drive appears, relegating the two action-oriented drives to background, and the baby might sleep. Then the Expressive Drive might combine with Quiescence to bring on dreams. Later still, Survival would function when the baby feels hunger, awakens, and demands to be fed. At this point, one or both of the drives that held sway might recede until the time, say, when the child is satiated and wriggles away from his/her mother's arms to go and adventure, after which.....and so on, as the cycle continues.

This process, with up-dated versions of the content of activities, continues throughout our lives. The rotation process may be compared to breathing, which we have done since birth without giving it much conscious attention. We actually breathe differently when racing or sleeping. However, if we are in a smoke-filled room, or someone dunks our head under water, smooth breathing is interrupted. Soon just breathing becomes our primary conscious concern. In the same way, most of the time we do not have to think about the operation of our drives when they rotate smoothly. However, if two drives are in serious conflict; or in reverse, if two drives are too tightly allied in suppressing the influence of a third, then there is inner turmoil and conscious attention to what is going on becomes necessary.

If the client is experiencing inner turmoil, it is first useful to have theoretical knowledge about the function of each of our drives. Next, identify which drive may be causing the difficulty. Then, determine whether the difficulty is due to: (a) the drive causing the difficulty having too much influence and being in conflict with the two others, or (b) this drive not having sufficient influence because the other two drives are colluding to suppress the appropriate use of this drive. Either way, seek to restore balance among all three drives by encouraging their smoother rotation.

### **Case examples**

The following are examples in which two drives dominate in tight association, at the expense of smooth rotation. No drive can be totally suppressed on a daily basis. However, in the following examples, two drives collude to exclude the third most of the time.

#### **1. Survival and Expressive combine to exclude Quiescence**

David was a well-known architect who thoroughly enjoyed his job. He was one of the lucky ones where Survival and Expressive cooperated fully, since his job offered him financial rewards and prestige, as well as challenges and creative opportunities when he developed a project. In his enthusiasm, he drove himself and his staff very hard, which led to

problems when staff members failed to be as involved in one project or another as David was. However, all in all, such conflicts were resolved, because David was always ready to put in extra time to compensate for others' lack of intensive participation. He worked hard and played hard. He and his partner enjoyed sports and travel, that they could sometimes combine with his business activity.

An enviable life! Unfortunately, one day, David suddenly lost consciousness and fell off his bike as he was bicycling to work. He would have died had he not been found in time. What happened? His Survival and Expressive Drives had combined too closely to exclude his Quiescence drive. He had not been allowing enough time for sleep or otherwise letting go. Paradoxically, the Survival Drive had participated in the process that endangered his life. What ultimately helped David was to change his lifestyle to allow time for meditation and listening to music, which he loved, but had stopped doing, and to allow the time needed for sleep. Tom realized that he had to delegate work to qualified associates, and allow them to proceed at their own pace without impatiently jumping in and instantly taking charge whenever someone on his staff seemed too slow.

## 2. Survival and Quiescence combine to exclude Expressive

When she was 20 years old, Jane's father died suddenly. Jane took over her father's failing textile business. To do so she dropped plans to go to the Juillard School of Music, where she had been accepted on scholarship. Instead, she concentrated on developing the company, thereby supporting herself, her mother and two younger siblings whom she put through college. By the time she was 40, Jane was the successful CEO of a thriving multi-million company, and greatly admired by peers and customers, both for her skills and her pleasant manner. However busy she was, she took good care of her health and so made sure to get enough "beauty sleep." She was deeply religious, but her life was drab.

After breaking off from yet another lover who turned out to be exploitative, as had been two before him, she sought counseling to understand why her choices of lovers were so poor by contrast to always having made good choices in business. With help, she saw that she was using her Survival and Quiescence Drives very well in business and daily care. However, her Expressive Drive lacked outlets. She tended to be attracted to flashy men who brought drama into her life, without evaluating them otherwise. Early on, Jane had resolutely turned her back on her musical talent, fearing a "distraction" from taking on the burden of her father's company. Having become too much of a work horse, she had allowed her creativity to wither.

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When she realized how she had been suffocating this part of herself, while it was too late to switch to a music career, she nevertheless became alert to how she could become more expressive and creative instead of "falling for a crazy partner," as she put it. Eventually, as she blossomed with a number of new interests, she found a new partner who was genuinely compatible.

## 3. Expressive and Quiescence combine to exclude Survival

Peter was the "difficult" child amongst his five siblings, though he had charm and was indulged by his mother. But his grades in school were always erratic, ranging from A to D. He was smart but mischievous, and, at times, "too much of a daydreamer." After he failed to be accepted by M.I.T., which was the only college that he applied to, he stayed home, "doing nothing," spending hours at his computer, or tinkering with gadgets in the family garage, without looking for a job or applying to another school. Just when his father was ready to lay down the law, Peter casually informed his parents that one of his patents was purchased by a computer company to the tune of two million dollars, and gave his astounded father half, sarcastically saying it was for room and board.

He moved out to a fancy loft, and was joined by two friends with whom he started his own company, that quickly grew into a multi-million enterprise. However, this was on paper. When the dot.com companies crashed, so did Peter's. Soon he became bankrupt and returned to his childhood home. Meanwhile his father had prudently cashed in Peter's gift and paid off the mortgage on the family house, so Peter was welcomed back and resumed his life of tinkering in the garage. To the surprise of his parents he did not seem at all upset about the reversal of his recent new-found fortune and maintained his optimistic sunny disposition and belief that soon he would be able to sell another one of his inventions.

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