AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
SOCIETY FOR PSYCHOANALYSIS AND PSYCHOANALYTIC PSYCHOLOGY
DIVISION 39
AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Psychoanalytic Psychology

ISSN: 0736-9735

2022, Vol. 39, No. 1, 5–11
https://doi.org/10.1037/pap0000395

Yalom, Strenger, and the Psychodynamics of Inner Freedom: A Contribution to Existential Psychoanalysis

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Carlo Strenger was a unique person, for many reasons. One such reason was his ability to integrate the existential (humanistic) and psychoanalytic schools of thought into a seamless whole. Nowhere is this seamless integration more apparent than in Strenger's treatment of *inner freedom*. In this article, I juxtapose Irvin Yalom's seminal work on the four existential concerns in psychopathology and psychotherapy (death, responsibility, isolation, and meaning) against Strenger's work on the psychodynamics of inner freedom. More specifically, I touch upon Strenger's identification of three psychological processes that enable inner freedom: self-creation (the tendency of some people to create their own personality "from the ashes," in the face of serious traumatic life circumstances), *Sosein* (active self-acceptance of one's own mistakes through life), and the act of transcending the fear of insignificance (the ability to live life through one's own eyes rather than through the eyes of historical accounts). Strenger's illumination of these processes, I argue, construes inner freedom as a higher-order existential concern that underlies the four concerns discussed by Yalom. I then discuss the way I put these theoretical observations to use in my theoretical and clinical work, focusing on depression and suicidality.

Keywords: freedom, existential psychoanalysis, Strenger, Yalom

Despite (and perhaps even because of) strong temperamental and attitudinal differences, Carlo Strenger and I were very close friends. He was an exceptional person on many counts. People were largely aware of his intellectual powers, much less aware of his unbelievable personal courage, and almost completely unaware of the quality of tenderness and softness he so meticulously labored to conceal. He did disclose this quality to the people who were close to him, and I am proud of having been among them. This "Strengerian" triad of smarts, courage, and softness was quite inspirational for me, both personally and professionally. I have tried, and still am trying, to hold on to this triad to this day.

Underlying this triad, I would argue, was Carlo's staunch conviction that humans are invariably *free*. He did not consider it a compliment to the human race. Rather, and on this we both agreed, it was yet another manifestation of the tragic nature of human existence. Why tragic? Because, according to Carlo, echoing the tradition of existential philosophy and psychology (see in particular, Cooper, 1999), people are free not only to pursue their curiosity (smarts), live their lives authentically even in the face of opposition (courage), and forgive themselves when they err (softness), but they are also free to make devastating mistakes, hurt others, and, ultimately, pave their way to death. Nevertheless, Carlo posited, it is the awareness of such freedom that transcends issues of life and death, and Carlo has made it a Sartrean fundamental project to facilitate this awareness, both in the clinic and in the public/political sphere.

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Because he, indeed, was a Sartrean of sorts, Strenger's freedom was not Pollyannaish: He did not deny "facticity" (May, 2012; Yalom, 1980). In fact, following his friend Irvin Yalom, he lamented past and recent tendencies of the humanistic movement to espouse freedom without boundaries (Strenger, 2005). Strenger's freedom was twofold: to be conscious of inner and outer reality, which is what made him a psychoanalyst, and to adopt an authentic position toward life in the face of such an awareness, which made him an existentialist. I, therefore, hold Carlo Strenger to be one of the chief contributors to the resurrected movement of existential psychoanalysis (e.g., Strenger, 1991, 1998, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2015; see also Shahar, 2010, 2015; Thompson, 1995, 2016).

My aim in this brief article is to elaborate on Strenger's fundamental project—to understand and inspire human freedom—by locating his work in the overarching theoretical umbrella presented by Yalom (1980) in his seminal treatise on existential psychotherapy. Yalom posits that the psychodynamic unconscious consists of "four existential concerns," of which we are all trying very hard not to be aware. These are death, freedom, isolation, and meaning. Although Yalom discusses freedom as one of these four concerns, I draw from Strenger's writings in postulating that, in fact, freedom underlies concerns with death, isolation, and meaning. In doing so, I touch upon Strenger's identification of three psychological processes that enable inner freedom: self-creation, *Sosein* (active self-acceptance), and transcending the fear of insignificance. I then discuss the way I put these theoretical observations to use in my clinical work with highly depressed and suicidal young people. I conclude with suggestions for future theoretical and clinical work.

Yalom's (1980) Four Existential Concerns

When Yalom's book, *Existential Psychotherapy*, was published in 1980, it was a breath of fresh air to many psychotherapists yearning for a systematic and cohesive framework for the

therapeutic work they considered existential. Yalom not only provided this framework, but further went on to illustrate, quite compellingly in my opinion, how the existential framework can be applied in clinical practice. But at the same time, and in a manner that has been, I believe, overlooked by many, Yalom also allied himself with psychoanalysis. And squarely so (for a direct treatment of the "stealth" with which existential psychology impacts psychotherapy, see Shahar & Schiller, 2016a). Yalom's alignment with psychoanalysis is evident from the fact that he completely endorses psychoanalysis' most important principle: the existence of a psychodynamic unconscious. Briefly stated, it is the notion that the human mind vehemently attempts, and often succeeds, in defending itself from knowing very painful facts about .... the human mind. In the opening chapters of *Existential Psychotherapy*, Yalom invested a lot of effort in challenging Freud's writings. However, his polemics focus on the content of the "Freudian" mind, rather than on its structure. Specifically, Yalom accepts the notion of the dynamic unconscious, namely, the tenet that unconscious contents are much more important than conscious ones, that many unconscious contents are highly offensive, and that the mind adopts a defensive posture against them, in an attempt to "not-know" them. Yalom's grievances against Freud concern the latter's use for drive and "economic" theories, and he even goes so far as to accuse Freud of narcissism in evading what, for Yalom, is the most threatening unconscious content: fear of death. However, once one accepts Yalom's criticism and is ready to replace defended, unconscious, "Freudian" mental contents with others, there is no fundamental difference between Freud and Yalom in terms of their view of the mind and its operations.

The contents which Yalom proposes in place of Freud's are known as his "four existential concerns." Unconscious and highly defended against, these are concerns that people harbor in the face of the existential situation, namely, the fact that humans are what they are living organisms with powerful reflective powers (what others would call "a prefrontal cortex," see Amati & Shallice, 2007) yet without instincts to guide their survival. The four existential concerns are as folows: (a) fear of the fact that we will die, (b) difficulties in accepting that we are free to shape our lives, (c) difficulties in realizing that, even though we are surrounded by people, we live and die alone, and (d) the angst stemming from our realization that meaning is not given to us, and thus we need to create or invent it for ourselves. I will explicate on these concerns, but only briefly and schematically, because the real thrust of this article is to tally these concerns with Strenger's writings.

Death

In his book on existential psychotherapy, Yalom extensively cites Ernest Becker's Magnum Opus, *The Denial of Death* (1973). He does this decades before this book became the philosophical basis of one of social psychologists' most successful theories, that is, Terror Management Theory (Greenberg & Arndt, 2012). In essence, Yalom echoes Becker in arguing that the fear of death is perhaps the strongest fear harbored by humans and that it is largely unconscious. He describes two defense mechanisms erected against death awareness: *specialness* (subdivided into compulsive heroism, narcissism, and aggression and control) and the belief in an *ultimate rescuer*. Both defenses, when overused, may lead to myriad forms of psychopathology, primarily neurosis but even schizophrenia. Yalom concludes the section on death by noting various ways in which existential psychotherapists may increase death awareness.

Freedom

Yalom's discussion on freedom is perhaps the section of his book that is most pertinent to Strenger's work. He opens his treatment of freedom with a focus on responsibility. The latter concept is predicated upon the existence of freedom because, in the absence of freedom, people cannot be expected to assume responsibility for their lives. However, because assuming such responsibility is inherently painful, people often evade and shrug off awareness of their freedom, a sentiment compellingly argued by Sartre, Erich Fromm, and other great thinkers. Responsibility—avoidance leads to a wide variety of clinical manifestations, and therapists' attempts to help their patients assume such responsibility is—according to Yalom—a daunting task. Next, Yalom breaks down responsibility into *willing* and its three components: decision, choice, and action. Here too, Yalom acknowledges the difficulty inherent in inspiring patients to either will, or know what they really want. In this section, Yalom draws extensively from Otto Rank's theory of the will, according to which psychotherapy is potentially a collusion of the will of the patient and the will of the therapist (see also Shahar, 2004). The discussion of freedom, responsibility, and willing all lead Yalom to highlight the role of the future in the psyche and in psychotherapy (see also Shahar, 2004, 2013, 2015; Summers, 2003). All of these themes are strongly echoed in Strenger's work.

Isolation

Even though Yalom acknowledges the fact that humans are social beings, his existential proclivities propel him to emphasize the fact that ultimately (or existentially), we live and die alone. According to Yalom, people abhor this realization and they try to avoid or shrug it off in multiple ways. In particular, the defense against existential isolation may assume the form of submerging oneself into seemingly selfless, inauthentic interpersonal relationships, an endeavor that assumes many shapes and forms. Existential isolation and the defenses against it permeate the therapeutic relationship, whereby both parties will tend to avoid awareness of their isolation in relation to each other, although it is the therapist's role to hold this awareness for the sake of the treatment.

Meaning

Drawing from a host of existential philosophers but primarily Albert Camus, Yalom examines the dire consequences of the fact that meaning is not given to us humans, even though we have to attain it in order to function. According to Yalom, the clinical manifestations of meaninglessness include phenomena such as crusadism, nihilism, vegetativeness (lack of life goals), and compulsive activity. Remedies to such meaningless proposed by existential psychotherapy, according to Yalom, include (a) *dereflection*, an intervention developed by the existential psychiatrist and psychotherapist Frankl (2006) which helps patients shift their attention outward, toward events in their actual reality and away from ruminative reflection, and (b) engagement, one's attempt, even if forced, to attain goals that may be personally important (these days,

this would be consistent with *behavioral activation*, see Dimaggio and Shahar (2017).

Why Freedom Is the Most Essential Existential Concern: A Modified Strengerian Perspective

To understand why freedom is arguably the most central existential concern, one must first problematize the notion of death anxiety. Carlo did not do it, but he could and should have, so I will do it on his behalf. A graphical depiction of the following is presented in Figure 1, where the quoted "Strenger" refers to my formulation on his behalf.

As the American activist and rapper Prince Ea maintains: "Everybody dies, but not everybody lives" (Prince Ea, 2016). Prince Ea here refers to the idea that, in fearing death, people are not fearing death per se, but the end of their existence as purposeful, locomotive agents (see Davidson & Shahar, 2007). What they fear, according to this view, is reaching the end of life and regretting *not having self-actualized*, not having lived their dreams. This, of course, is compatible with the notion of existential guilt (Lucas, 2004).

If people fear the regrets they may have about not self-actualizing throughout their lives, then why do not they simply do it? Because, as a long slew of psychoanalytic, humanistic, and existential thinkers posit, self-actualization is all but simple. It necessitates confusion ("what do I really want?"), failure in attaining one's goals, and long stretches of uncertainty and loneliness. By refraining from self-actualization, people may avoid these predicaments. However, as long as one lives, one is aware, if only dimly, to the extent to which one pursues self-actualization. This tension between physically living but not actually living up to one's potential is frightening (Tillich, 1955/2000). It is what Otto Rank calls *life anxiety* (Spitz, 1989; see also in Yalom, 1980).

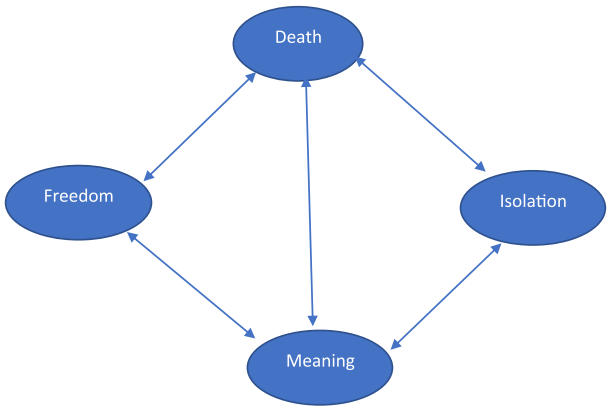
There is only one way out of this quagmire: venturing out. That is, choosing to discover what and who one really is, and then putting it to the test by living it. However, because choice presupposes freedom, freedom arises as the most central existential concern. In fact, it is the entire process of journeying toward the discovery of authenticity that mitigates the three other existential concerns: Living authentically makes life something worth dying for, hence mitigating death anxiety. The journey itself is inevitably made alongside other people, thereby relieving some of the existential isolation. And, as stated by Winnicott, "Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real" (1960, p. 148). When one feels real, meaninglessness is moot.

Carlo Strenger's understanding of these dictums was profound, and this understanding enabled him to examine the dialectical, two-edged nature of choice and freedom, namely, the fact that when one exercises one's freedom and chooses a certain kind of life, both bad and good things happen. Below, I will refer to three instances of freedom and choice analyzed by Strenger: self-creation, Sosein, and transcending the fear of insignificance.

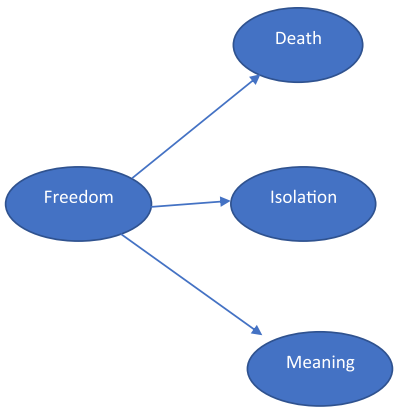
Figure 1

Role of Freedom in Existential Concerns According to Yalom and "Strenger"

Yalom (1980)



"Strenger"



Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

Self-Creation

As indicated critically by Yalom, "An individual's character is not the result of a single momentous decision that can be traced and erased . . . " (1980, p. 317). While this might be true in general, numerous clinical and literary examples suggest that, at least for some, crucial and willful decisions made during the transition to adolescence do play a major role in personality development and subsequent well-being. I was convinced of this by Strenger's (1998) article, "The Desire for Self-Creation," published in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, in which he describes Clarrisa, an attractive 30-year-old attorney seeking help for intense feelings of loneliness, meaninglessness, and lack of direction. Clarissa is, for Strenger, an example of people who "feel that aspects of their past or limitations of their present prevent them from living a life they experience as worth living. They embark on a project of fully recreating themselves" (Strenger, 1998, p. 625 [Abstract]). These people, Strenger continues,

> had strongly developed characters, were mostly quite involved in their lives, and—as in Clarissa's case—were quite successful professionally. Nevertheless, they felt that their lives were not worth living, and they suffered great mental pain. They felt locked into their lives, and the very experience of living became claustrophobic. It was as if their lives ran an inexorable course they could not change. They felt they were serving a prison sentence in their lives. (p. 626)

When Clarissa described her childhood, it was apparent that she had grown up in poverty, with a mentally ill (probably schizoaffective) mother and an aloof, unreliable father. Severe neglect and physical and emotional abuse pervaded her early upbringing. When she was eight, her parents got divorced. Clarrisa stayed with her father and they relocated to another city. For 4 years, Clarrisa kept to herself, excelled in school but had no friends, and the only close relationship she had labored to form was with her father. When she was 12 years old, Clarissa's father remarried to a woman who disliked Clarrisa, and in a Dickensian manner not lost on Strenger, abused her emotionally and neglected her physically. Strenger describes Clarissa's reaction as follows:

> Clarissa waited for her father to stand by her side, but he wouldn't. She tried to fight for her rights on her own, only to be defeated and humiliated. This was when a new thought got hold of her mind: "If I cannot bear it anymore, I can always kill myself." (p. 632)

This was far from the first or last betrayal by Clarissa's father. Numerous occasions such as these proceeded into her young adulthood, fortifying her suicidality. She graduated law school, moved to Israel, met a man she did not love, married him nonetheless and then divorced him, only to become profoundly depressed and hopeless about her life. It was then that she came to treatment with Carlo. Telling her life story in treatment only exacerbated her depression and suicidality. Carlo reported being worried and reaching out to Clarrisa, who pushed him away, saying there was nothing to worry about. But then:

> Two days later, the descent into hell began. At noon, I got a phone call. Clarissa's voice was weak, her speech blurred. "I have just woken up. I don't understand why it didn't work." Alarmed, I asked, "What happened?" Clarissa said, "Twelve hours ago I opened the gas. I don't understand. I closed all the windows, I put cellotape around them. I don't understand why it didn't work." I told her to "take a taxi and come here immediately." I made some phone calls to reschedule other sessions, and, while waiting for Clarissa, my mind raced a mile a minute. What support could I count on? Her family did not live in the country, and, even if they had, I doubted that they would have been of any help.
>
> I knew that, by hospitalizing Clarissa, I would write her death warrant with my own hands. She was a proud young woman; her whole life had been a fight with feelings of unbearable shame, and she would never accept the stigma of having been hospitalized. So how could I protect her? (pp. 633–634)

What followed was a long series of suicide attempts, coupled with Clarrisa's insistence that, if Carlo hospitalized her, she would surely commit suicide. Carlo anxiously deliberated over hospitalization. He saw Clarrisa everyday and refrained from hospitalizing her. He did, however, come to understand her:

> All of my attempts to get her to see that this will to survival might be the expression of her deepest wishes rather than some blind biological force failed. It was to take me a month—during which I saw Clarissa seven times a week, usually for 90 min or 2 hr, and another suicide attempt—to understand my terror and to understand why survival was *not* Clarissa's deepest wish. (p. 635)

What was Clarrisa's deepest wish, then? Carlo notes: "I thought that Clarissa's only chance to survive was to experience once in her life that someone was really willing to meet her needs" (p. 635). Her main need was to tell her story, despite the terrible distress and the suicidality that it evoked in her, in the presence of someone who would be able to tolerate the story without restricting her freedom (i.e., hospitalizing her). In fact, Carlo came to realize that for Clarrisa, "suicide was the proof that she was truly free—that her greatest fear was that she would be *trapped in life and that she might not be able to die.*" He continues, "I also understood why I had been afraid to fully accept this. If I did, I might have to accept that, for her, suicide was the one and only act of freedom." (p. 638). Carlo then wrote her a letter in which he stated that no matter the circumstances, he would never hospitalize her because he was aware of the fact that she needed to be free much more than she needed to be physically alive. After weeks of testing to see if he was serious, Clarrisa was convinced. She told Carlo: "Look, now I know that I can do it if I want to. Now I can wait and see" and within a month, Carlo writes, "Clarissa assured me for the first time that she had no immediate intention to kill herself" (p. 638).

This amazing article tells the tale—not only of a remarkable patient—but also of an outstandingly brave and skilled psychotherapy. Knowing that treating suicidality is my own creed, Carlo has confessed to me that he is not at all sure that today he will handle the case as he had done back then. At hindsight, Carlo stated to me, perhaps he would have tried to convinced Clarrisa to freely admit herself to an open daycare. Perhaps other technical aspects of the psychotherapy would have been different today (e.g., the number of sessions per week). Nevertheless, in reflecting on what Carlo himself calls an "impossible psychotherapy," Carlo quite chillingly states the following: "I learned from Clarissa that the desire for authorship can, paradoxically, be stronger than the desire for life" (p. 639). Anyone who has known Carlo knows fully well that he applied this statement to his own life. On a more profound, theoretical level, this statement reflects the above-noted existential postulate concerning the centrality of freedom to the human psyche. To live is to author. Authorship necessitates the conviction that one has the ability to influence one's life story.

Active Self-Acceptance (Sosein)

Unlike authoring, say, a novel, authoring a life story is done, by definition, partly retrospectively. Events happen to people (e.g., childhood maltreatment, in Clarrisa's case) and are then used to author a twist of plot. Some of these events are self-generated—propelled by the individuals themselves. With respect to a subset of self-generated events, individuals feel tremendous guilt and remorse, particularly when they reach midlife. Put differently, they feel that by propelling these events, they have essentially screwed, and/or are continuing to screw, their own lives. It is at this point that Strenger's (2009) work proposes such a brilliant insight on both theoretical and clinical grounds. Drawing from Karl Jaspers' philosophical work, Strenger proposes to patients the vision of accepting who they *fundamentally* are, which is labeled by Jasper *Sosein* (in German: being thus and no other). Such acceptance is difficult because it involves accepting the mistakes made in the course of attempting to actualize *Sosein.* It becomes even more difficult when in the course of it we realize that what we have called "mistakes" are actually the correct decisions in service of Sosein, even if made for the wrong reasons. As a consequence, this self-acceptance is deliberate (based on choice) and thus an active process.

Strenger illustrates this point with a patient he calls Daniel, a refined art historian who was constantly cheating on his wife. Daniel

loathed himself, saying "this is not who I want to be. I look at myself and I see a dandyish aesthete, a man who never picked a fight and took the easy way. I can't stand being this person!" (2009, p. 3). Daniel loathed himself for two reasons: his infidelity and the fact that he deemed himself to be mediocre in his field. In examining his past, Strenger helped Daniel identify the pressure his parents had put on him to be a refined academic and to marry a rich woman. However, Daniel was resistant both to change that stems from such identification and to Strenger's astute psychoanalytic interpretations. He held on firmly to the position of self-loathing. It was in this phase of the treatment that Strenger stumbled upon Sosein, telling his patient the following:

> The bottom line of what I'm saying is: However we understand your existential stance towards your life, it is not something that can or will change through understanding itself. In the end, Daniel, you will have to make a choice—and that's your sole responsibility. I can advise; I can be there for dialogue. But the choice will be yours .... there is just one thing I would like to add" I said, remembering the quotation from Jaspers that opens this article. "Sometimes acceptance of who we are opens the possibility of becoming who we can be; because as long as we rage against what we are, transformation is simply not possible. (p. 16)

To this, Daniel responded favorably. After a brief period of moderate depression, he succeeded in stopping the cheating, in turn forming a genuinely intimate bond with his wife. He also reinvented himself as an art historian by developing a course in an area he had always been fascinated with, but had never tackled. The course turned into an authored book, which was very well received in the field.

If only I had read Strenger's (2009) paper in 1998, a decade before it had been published, when I was interning in Israel, I am sure my internship would have been much easier. At that time, I was treating a woman who had arrived to treatment after a brief hospitalization for severe major depression. I have described this patient, Ms. J, in a paper focused on the political (i.e., power-related) nature of transference-countertransference exchanges (Shahar, 2004). At the beginning of treatment, Ms. J, a 55-year-old public relations agent, was explicitly connecting her hospitalization with the helplessness she felt about her adolescent son's condition. He had emotional problems and special needs and could not fit any form of outpatient treatment. A lot of Ms. J's rage was directed toward her husband, who she depicted as a decent, grounded, and pragmatic person, and who, unlike herself, was not alarmed by their son's condition. Ms. J felt that her son was doomed to live "at the margins of life." She was angry that her husband did not share this view and consequently was not helping her to prevent it. In exploring her childhood, it became clear from where Ms. J took the dire image of living on the "margins of life"—despite their appearance as "normal" people, her parents' relationship was highly tumultuous, marred by quarrels and physical altercations. Ms. J. left the house at 15 and married her husband during college. Claiming she had never loved him, she explained that she married him because "he was gentle and emotionally stable" (p. 372). But she was disappointed with him for being "emotionally shallow and intellectually boring" (p. 372). And, as noted above, she could not forgive him for failing to share her view of their son's fate. However, in the course of the tumultuous (albeit brief) treatment, which consisted of a dramatic rupture and a somewhat feeble repair, Ms. J came to view her decision to marry her husband as the right one. It was his stability, reliability, and predictability that enabled her to feel safe and secure, and this sense of security enabled her to focus on her successful career and even to cope with the stressors related to her son's predicaments. It was only after she actually owned her marital choice as her Sosein that the worries about her son's fate quieted down to the point of improving the relationship with her husband.

Transcending the Fear of Insignificance

Carlo's work on active self-acceptance is very closely related to his identification of a noxious contemporary cultural malady: the fear of insignificance (Strenger, 2003; see also Strenger, 2011). Carlo defines this fear as the worry that one will not actualize one's talents to the point of reaching a worldwide impact such as that reached by Carlo's favorite example, Mark Zuckerberg, in developing Facebook. In Carlo's published analysis, as well as in his discussions with me on both personal and theoretical matters (for both of us, the divide between the two was quite thin), Carlo noted that the fear of insignificance goes way beyond *malignant self-criticism*, which was and still is one of my fields of inquiry (e.g., Shahar, 2015, 2016). In a way, the fear of insignificance is malignant self-criticism on steroids, wherein the steroids are globalization and the information revolution. Carlo referred to "homo globalis" as persons who see themselves as a citizen of the entire globe, owing to the fact that they understand numerous languages and cultures, and are able to easily reach any place in the world. Superimposed upon this pattern is the way societies, cultures, and organizations provide their members with a sense of worth. They do so quantitatively, in the form of measurable indices. Another one of Carlo's favorite examples was academia, in the way it rewards and promotes faculty members based on the number of times their work is cited, the impact factors of journals in which their articles appear, etc. Because such measures are inherently relative (i.e., there is always a looming possibility that someone else in your field will be more extensively cited), the vast majority of academics are likely to feel that their work is insignificant.

If this is the malady, what is the remedy? The obvious first step is active self-acceptance: acknowledging your Sosein and owning how your particular talents, in interacting with the world around you, not only propelled but also enabled you to reach the accomplishments that you have actually reached, rather than the accomplishments reached by other people under other circumstances. However, to be able to practice active self-acceptance, one has to choose to be knowledgeable about oneself. Strenger noted the importance of self-knowledge to active self-acceptance already in his 2009 article, but he greatly expanded upon it in his 2011 book and later works. He was aware of the fact that self-knowledge is very difficult to attain, not only because it is hard earned but also, as we understand through psychoanalytic theory and the psychodynamic unconscious because it is painful. So too is the decision to come to treatment, which is the arena within which the most painful bits of self-knowledge are acquired. Thus, the acquisition of self-knowledge is predicated upon a bold choice, another manifestation of the centrality of freedom in the psyche. It is also the bridge connecting Strenger the existential psychoanalyst with Strenger the social/political theorist and commentator. Carlo was a staunch supporter of liberalism, because he saw the connection between liberal values and the ability to freely attend to painful, even paralyzing, contents in one's soul.

Continuing Carlo: The Reformulated Object Relations Theory (RORT) and Integrative Psychotherapy With Depressed–Suicidal Young People

When Carlo once inquired about my professional plans for the future, I replied that I had a very detailed plan to do more of the same: study complex psychopathology (primarily depression and suicidality), treat complex patients (primarily adolescents and young adults), and write about it all from a combined theoretical, empirical, and clinical point of view. "I have no inclination," I said to Carlo, "to invent myself again and again, like you did." Carlo's response, delivered in his sober, European tone, was typical: "So the good news is that you will continue to do the same things, and the bad news is that you will continue to do the same things."

"Exactly!" I replied.

And so I do. However, my acquaintance with Carlo and the close relationship we developed have made a huge impact on these "same things" that I have been doing, and perhaps they even continue Carlo's legacy in one or more ways. I am referring here to my relatively recent reformulation of Klein's (1928) notion of the *positions*, and particularly the *depressive position* (Shahar, 2018, 2021). Specifically, Klein viewed the positions as a synergistic amalgamation of key anxieties (a paranoid-schizoid anxiety centered around a fear of overwhelming aggression versus a depressive anxiety evolving about the fear of harming the "good"), defense mechanisms (in Klein's theory: primitive defenses aimed at polarizing good and bad, which are mobilized against the paranoid-schizoid anxiety versus more neurotic anxieties causing unawareness of one's inner flaws, thus addressing the depressive anxiety), and part-versus-whole mental representations of self and object (in Klein's theory: experiencing self and others as solely good or bad, or, alternatively, in a holistic and nuanced way).

My reformulation of Melanie Klein's position is fourfold. First, it replaces Klein's poetic jargon with clear, social–cognitive nomenclature. Second, in contrast to Klein's sole focus on anxiety, I postulate that positions include a wide spectrum of emotions. Third, I adhere to a flexible, phenomenological view of the unconscious and refrain from making a distinction between unconscious defense mechanisms and conscious coping strategies. But the most pertinent reformulation is existentially based: I posit that positions not only pertain to individuals' past and present, but also to their future—to the ways they wish to experience self and other. This is where Carlo's (and Yalom's, and the other existential theorists') impact upon my thinking is most evident: my growing appreciation of the central role of the future in the psyche (see Amati & Shallice, 2007; Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Seligman et al., 2013; Shahar & Davidson, 2009; Shahar, 2004; Shahar et al., 2004, 2012; Summers, 2003). In the context of my reformulation of Klein's depressive position, I posit that such position is comprised primarily of criticism-based emotions directed to both self and other (e.g., shame, guilt, remorse, anger, hate, disgust, contempt), feeding back into schemas and scripts of a deficient self attempting to appease a punitive other. Formed during childhood in the context of harsh and punitive parent–child relationships, these schemas and scripts (object relations) surface in the present through interpersonal action that solidifies a social environment marred with rejections and criticism. But the point where depression runs the risk of getting translated into suicidal depression is when the depressive position is projected into the future: Individuals craft, in their mind, a "glorious" future that is the complete opposite of the past they have endured and the present they unwittingly secure. Such a projection is essentially defensive, guided by cognitive distortions and maladaptive defense mechanisms, which in turn recreate (some would say, reenact) a negative social environment that frustrates an individual's hopes and pushes them into suicidality. But the moments during which the individual plans (Ogden would say *phantasies*) this "glorious" future are the moments in which they feel most liberated. That such freedom might ultimately "lock" individuals within a quagmire (see Strenger's Clarissa), is a dialectic that Carlo understood very well.

Which is why, clinically, I introduce the notions of future goals, choices, and plans, very early in my psychotherapy with depressed and suicidal patients. Unlike Carlo, who specialized in working with very accomplished—and quite complex—adults reaching their midlife, my clinic mostly caters to adolescents and young adults suffering from all forms of affective disorders, primarily treatment-resistant ones—suicidal ones. Experiencing failure in past treatments, these patients are often demoralized, and one of their goals in treatment is to present such demoralization to me in the most evocative ways. To that aim, they are quick to attack three entities: themselves (self-criticism), me (undermining my experience of myself as a competent therapist), and their futures (saying they have none whatsoever). As Moran Schiller and I noted earlier (Shahar & Schiller, 2016b), one of the earliest goals of therapy with treatment resistant, depressed young people is to hold their future for them. This is done in three ways: fighting for the future (resisting patients' attempt to annihilate their future by derogating it, or by sabotaging the therapy), explicating the future (insisting on talking about it, being able to increasingly imagine it), and playing with the future (making subtle and symbolic preparations for the future, see example in Shahar & Schiller, 2016b).

It is only when my patients' futures are somewhat defended that I turn to more exploratory, psychodynamic analyses of the past origins of their object relations. Yalom would call it an analysis of project relations. And here is a closing of the circle.

摘要

Strenger是一个独特的人，这样说可以有许多的原因。一个原因是他将存在主义（人本主义）与精神分析思想的流派整合进一个不可分割的整体的能力。这种无缝的整合最明显的莫过于Strenger对于内在自由的处理。本文中我列举了Irvin Yalom著作关于精神病理学和心理治疗中的四个存在问题（死亡，责任，孤立和意义），这些是反对Strenger关于内在自由的精神动力学的。更具体地说，我谈及了Strenger的使内心自由的三个心理过程的认同：自我创造（有些人在面对严重的创伤性生活环境时"从灰烬中"创造出自己人格的倾向），如此之在（主动的自我接纳一生中自己的错误），以及超越对无意义的恐惧的行动（通过自己的眼睛而不是通过历史记录来进行生活的能力）。我认为，Strenger对这些过程的启发，将内心自由作为一个更高层级的存在主题进行了解释，构成了Yalom讨论的四个主题的基础。我接着讨论了我如何将这些理论观察应用于我的理论和临床工作，主要聚焦于抑郁症和自杀。

关键词：自由，存在主义精神分析，Strenger，Yalom

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