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CLINICAL STUDIES IN PSYCHIATRY
CONCEPTIONS OF MODERN PSYCHIATRY
THE FUSION OF PSYCHIATRY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
THE INTERPERSONAL THEORY OF PSYCHIATRY
PERSONAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY
THE PSYCHIATRIC INTERVIEW
SCHIZOPHRENIA AS A HUMAN PROCESS

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THE
Interpersonal Theory
of Psychiatry

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lem. Thus let me warn my fellow psychiatrists: If you want to do psychiatry that can well be crowded into a lifetime, see if you can't find something besides the sexual problem in the strangers that come to you for help. Quite frequently it is no trick at all to find something very much more serious than the sexual difficulty; and quite often the sexual difficulty is remedied in the process of dealing with the other problems. You may notice that there is a slight difference here between my views and some of the views that have been circulated in historic times.

CHAPTER 18

Late Adolescence

The mark which, to my way of thinking, separates early adolescence from late adolescence is not a biological maturation but an achievement. Such a discrimination as that between early and late adolescence would not be needed in a social organization in which the culture provided facilitation and capable direction for the achievement of adequate and satisfactory genital activity. But in our own and allied cultures, every taboo from the religious to the political is applied to this last of our developmental achievements.

Late adolescence extends from the patterning of preferred genital activity through unnumbered educative and educative steps to the establishment of a fully human or mature repertoire of interpersonal relations, as permitted by available opportunity, personal and cultural. In other words, a person begins late adolescence when he discovers what he likes in the way of genital behavior and how to fit it into the rest of life. That is an achievement of no mean magnitude for a large number of the denizens of our culture. The failure to achieve late adolescence is, in fact, the last blow to a great many warped, inadequately developed personalities. Because this kind of experience is such an all-absorbing and all-frustrating preoccupation, it often constitutes the presenting difficulty which precedes the eruption of very grave personality disorder in a large number of people; it is of course by no means the actual difficulty.

The Importance of Opportunity

The outcome of late adolescence is so much a matter of accident that whether one continues to be, dynamically, a late adolescent
throughout life, or actually achieves something that might reasonably be called human maturity, is often no particular reflection on anything more than one's socioeconomic status and the like. Opportunity, as I have used it in my definition, is now a matter of other people and of the institutional or gross social facilitation and prohibition. A psychiatrist sees people who have already gone much further had they had a chance at the educational experience which others at this time of life are able to undergo.

We cannot escape the fact that many people who have had excellent developmental opportunity are caught, perhaps chiefly because of the culture, in circumstances in which there are exceedingly restricted opportunities for further growth. For example, suppose that the eldest son in a rather large family in the lower economic cadres finds himself suddenly in the position of wage earner for the family because of the death of the father. Now if this eldest son has had excellent developmental opportunity up to that point, it becomes practically certain that he will take over a large measure of the responsibility for giving the younger siblings opportunities. Along with his taking over of the responsibilities previously carried by his father, there will be a corresponding very marked reduction of his opportunities to live and learn. Thus there is no gainsaying the 'real' factors entirely outside of the developmental history of the person concerned.

Yet at the same time there are people who, with all the educational opportunities in the world, simply do not have the capacity to adequately observe and analyze the opportunities which come to them, because of inherent defect or because of various types of warp which they have not been able to correct in time. The only chance that such a person has then—except by an act of God—is through psychiatry. And how small that chance is has become more and more overwhelmingly apparent to me the longer I live.

Growth of Experience in the Syntaxic Mode

Insofar as the long stretch of late adolescence is successful, there is a great growth of experience in the syntaxic mode. Consider, for example, a person from a fairly well-knit community and a pretty good home, who has fortunately achieved a patterning of his genital behavior. If he then goes to a university, he is given several years of truly extraordinary opportunity to observe his fellows, to hear about people in various parts of the world, to discuss what has been presented and observed, to find out, on this basis, what in his past experience is inadequately grasped, and what is a natural springboard to grasping the new. In other words, for the fortunate, the educational opportunity provided by living at a university is very great.

But this is also the time when people who are not that fortunate, or who are not interested in further education, are attempting to establish some way of making a living, as wage earners, or exploiters of their fellow man, or something or other. Within limits, the kind of experience obtained is much the same as at a university, except for the probable lack of the broad, cultural interest which we trust characterizes all higher formal education. But the education in how to make a living, how to get on with people in the same line of work, is similarly a source of a great deal of observational data, and provides great possibilities for interchange of views, for expanding of one's limitations, and for the validating of one's hunches. Thus, once a person who is not very seriously warped has got the sex problem settled reasonably well, whatever he does is bound to broaden his acquaintance with other people's attitudes toward living, the degree of their interdependence in living, and the ways of handling various kinds of interpersonal problems—much of which is learned by trial and error from human example. In other words, in late adolescence one refines relatively personally-limited experience into the consensually dependable, which is much less limited. Just as in preadolescence a very remarkable, if sketchy, social organization develops on the basis of the people actually available for social organization, so in late adolescence everyone is more or less integrated into society as it is. Some of those whose opportunities are great are potentially able to integrate literally with the world society—to be at home in the world. Those who are working as apprentices in machine shops, for example, have, needless to say, vastly less opportunity in terms of geographical and cultural scope. But still they are now, from the viewpoint of society, going concerns in every way—provided with the franchise, expected to pay income tax, and the like. In general, late adolescents are adults in the eyes of the law, and have
all the benefits and handicaps thereunto appertaining. Thus they have to take on a good many responsibilities which are written into the culture; they may have evaded these responsibilities thus far, but now they have to develop ways of at least giving the appearance of meeting some of them. If they are fortunate, their growth goes on and on; they observe, formulate, and validate more and more; and at the same time, their foresight continuously expands so that they can foresee their career line—not as it inevitably will be, but in terms of expectation and probability, with perhaps provisions for disappointment.

Inadequate and Inappropriate Personifications of the Self and Others

Now the fact that a great many people don't seem to get very far in this phase of personality development is to be understood primarily from the consideration of the role of anxiety in their living, which is, in turn, a way of referring to self-system functioning within the personality. Long since, I mentioned the peculiar tendency of the self-system to govern 'writting' experience, so that one tends to be strangely unchanging in spite of what might be called objective opportunities for observing and analyzing, and learning and changing. And when it comes to finding out why people do not profit from experience and why people get so short a distance toward maturity in long stretches of time, one has primarily to consider the nature and functional activity of the self-system of the person concerned. At the level where communication is fairly easy, this critical opposition of anxiety, of self-system function, is manifest as inadequate and inappropriate personification of the self. People have come to hold views of themselves which are so far from valid formulations that these views are eternally catching them in situations in which the incongruity and inappropriateness are about to become evident, whereupon the person suffers the interference of anxiety. And as I have said before, when anxiety is severe, it has almost the effect of a blow on the head; one isn't really clear on the exact situation in which the anxiety occurred. A phenomenon which is very much more important in the later phases of personality development is that people become extremely agile at responding to minor hints of anxiety. By that I don't mean that the person warns himself, "You will be anxious presently if you are not careful!"—not at all. But nevertheless the appearance of just a little anxiety serves to deflect living away from the situation, just as the amoebae are deflected away from the hot water, as I have mentioned much earlier.

Thus the most accessible aspects of the self-system in many late adolescents show such superficially incomprehensible falsifications in the person's view of himself that he is not apt to learn very much in this field unless somebody goes to a great deal of trouble to put him through educative experience. And this kind of experience is fraught with relatively severe anxiety which—as I hope you will grasp by now—people put up with only when they can't help themselves. When the imperative necessity for change is recognized through psychiatric or similar experience, then most people are able to stand some anxiety, although I suppose this varies on the basis of individual past experience. To say that a person is able to stand some anxiety is another way of saying that he is able to observe previously ignored and misinterpreted experience in such a way that his formulation of himself and of living can change in a favorable direction. One might suppose, then, that anybody who has had considerable anxiety ought to have made wonderful progress in development. But the joker to that is that the overwhelming conviction of the necessity for change is, in other than special circumstances, utterly lacking in people who suffer a great deal of anxiety. In fact, they expect to go on indefinitely as they are; they can't do anything about it; and when you attempt to show them what might be done about it, they get still more anxious and know that you are bad medicine and avoid you. What I am attempting to suggest at this point is that there is a very considerable difference between being very much in the grip of anxiety, mild or severe, and, as it were, 'coming to grips' with a source of anxiety, mild or severe.

Now I shall have to digress long enough to remove any shadows of voluntaristic meaning from my use of such expressions as "coming to grips" with anxiety and "confronting" anxiety. There seems to be very little profit in psychiatry from dependence on any such idea as the mysterious power of the will. I think I have touched on this before in discussing the evil effects of the doctrine of the will
on development. In a society in which people are usually quite
proud of their will and are noisy about it, I would like to warn
psychiatrists that the less voluntaristic their language, and the more
utterly free their thinking from convictions about the will, the
further they will be able to get in understanding and perhaps fa-
vorably influencing their patients. So when I speak of the con-
fronting of anxiety, I do not mean that a psychiatrist asks a pa-
tient to pull himself together and exert his will so that he will not
so easily yield to the threat of anxiety. What the psychiatrist does,
if he accomplishes anything in this particular, is to so nurture in
the patient correct foresight of the near future that it becomes
intolerable to be always running away from minor anxiety. The
appearance of anxiety is in no sense connected with any mytho-
logical or real will; it is connected with experience which has been
incorporated into and become a part of the self-system and with
the foresight of increasing anxiety in connection with the self-
system. The problem of the psychiatrist is more or less to spread
a larger context before the patient; insofar as that succeeds, the
patient realizes that, anxiety or not, the present way of life is un-
satisfactory and is unprofitable in the sense that it is not changing
things for the better; whereupon, in spite of anxiety, other things
being equal, the self-system can be modified.

In addition to inadequate and inappropriate personifications of
the self, there are, attendant upon that, and in congruity with it,
inadequate and inappropriate personifications of others. Such in-
adegacy and inappropriateness of secondary personifications—
secondary because to most people they seem less important than
a person’s personification of himself—may apply broadly to every-
one, or specifically to stereotypes of certain alleged people. A
person cannot personify others with any particular refinement ex-
cpt in terms of his own personification of himself and in terms
of more-or-less imaginary entities related by the ‘not’ technique to
his personification of himself. If you regard yourself as generous,
then you tend to assume that others will be generous; but since
you have a good deal of experience not in keeping with that, you
personify many people as ungenerous, not generous. Now that
doesn’t give you any particularly good formulation of what they
are; they are just different and opposite from you in one of your
better aspects. Thus, to a remarkable degree this limitation in the
personification of others is based on inappropriate and inadequate
personification of oneself. Particularly troublesome are the inade-
quate and inappropriate personifications by what I have referred
to as stereotypes, which again reflect the limitations in the personi-
fication of the self. We often encounter the most accessible part
of such things as prejudices, intolerances, fears, hatreds, aver-
sions, and revulsions that pertain to alleged classes of people. Now
these stereotypes may concern newsboys, the Jews, the Greeks,
the Communists, the Chinese, or what have you. They are, need-
less to say, not based on adequate observation, analysis, and con-
sensual validation of data about the people concerned.

Stereotypes reflect inadequate and inappropriate elements in
one’s own self-system; thus all the special stereotypes are either
poor imitations of ingredients in the personified self, or—even
more inadequate in terms of providing a guide in life—they are
not elements from the personification of the self. For example, the
view that the Irish are all politicians can be held with perfect im-
punity and peace of mind either by people who show remarkable
political gifts, or by those who show remarkable political im-
becility. That is, if you are a good politician you can stereotype a
whole ethnic group or biethic group with this characteristic, and
if you are a rotten politician you can simply stigmatize a group
with a not variant of yourself.

Incidentally—to continue a little further with the subject of
prejudice and stereotypes—I am myself inclined to think that the
Irish are pagans. Now there is no shadow of doubt in my mind that
any sort of searching study of the current residents of Ireland
would toss up a great many instances in which the term pagan
would be irrelevant, in any meaningful sense. What I have in mind
is that in many ethnic groups or ethnic communities which are
vigorous Christian in their protestations, one can find, as soon
as one gets into actual informative interchange with their mem-
ers about their religious convictions, a truly wonderful survival
of types of attitude toward transcendental power and so on which
have very little indeed to do with Christian prescriptions. The
Irish, who happen to be my ancestral people, are a little better
known to me than are, for example, the Chinese; and so I feel—
after the best modern pattern—perfectly free to make a wisecrack about the underlying religious attitude of my people. But, thank God, I know that it may or may not make any sense; I wouldn’t think of staking anything on it. It is all right for parlor conversation with good friends, preferably Irish. But if I say it often to other people, I may very unhappily present them with an opportunity to clinch an uninformed prejudice, which is usually done by nailing it onto a preceding one. Whether such remarks are amusing wisecracks which may be used for little prestige purposes, and so on, as doubtless my comment about the pagan Irish is, or whether they are a device for avoiding any growth of intelligence, information, and consensual agreement about whole huge sections of the human race, largely depends on the extent to which the prejudice expressed reflects a serious limitation in the personification of the self.

The purposes served by these stereotypes are many. But the alleged purpose which almost any unsophisticated person will immediately produce under suitable circumstances is one of the saddest commentaries on the misfortunes of personality in our world and time: namely, that they are very useful guides for dealing with strangers. Quite simply, they are not. They are, insofar as they are important, exactly the opposite of guides for dealing with strangers; they are inescapable handicaps in becoming acquainted with strangers. And to that extent they are chiefly effective in denying one any opportunity for spontaneous favorable change in the corresponding limitation in one’s personification of oneself.

Paratexitic Processes to Minimize Anxiety

In further commenting on the critical opposition of anxiety and the self-system to favorable growth in late adolescence, I would like to call attention to the paratexitic processes concerned in avoiding and minimizing anxiety. These processes extend from selective inattention—which to a certain extent covers the world like a tent—through all the other classical dynamisms of difficulty, to the gravest dissociation of one or more of the vitally essential human dynamisms. And incidentally, while I once liked the rubric, dynamism of difficulty, it has lost its charm over my years of attempt-

ing to teach psychiatry, because the conviction grew among some of the people who encountered this usage that these dynamisms represented peculiarities shown by the morbid. On the contrary, I believe that there are no peculiarities shown by the morbid; there are only differences in degree—that is, in intensity and timing—of that which is shown by everyone. Thus whenever I speak of dynamisms I am discussing universal human equipment, sometimes represented almost entirely in dreadful distortions of living, but still universal. And the distortions arise from misfortunes in development, restrictions of opportunity, and the like. Thus the interventions of the self-system which are striking in this late adolescent phase—that is, in chronologic maturity—cover the whole field of what we like to talk about as being psychiatric entities—mental disorders, if you please.

Restrictions in Freedom of Living

Another way of approaching the general topic of the self-system’s prevention of favorable change in the late adolescent phase is to consider restrictions in freedom of living, with their complex processes for the discharge of the integrating tendencies that are restricted. This is a different approach to what we have already discussed and is an attempt to highlight certain things which we have not noticed before.

By restrictions in freedom of living, I refer here to the limitations that arise ‘internally,’ because of handicaps in one’s past, and not to the restrictions which come under the broad classification of opportunity, which I have touched on before. Restrictions in freedom of living are attended by complex ways of getting at least partial satisfaction for what one’s restrictions prevent and by further complex processes, in the shape of sleep disorders and the like, for discharging dangerous accumulations of tensions. These restrictions may be usefully considered from the standpoint of restricted contact with others and of restrictions of interest. Restricted contact with others may range from the early develop-

3 I am always in these remarks eliminating the organic; in other words, if someone shoots away half of a person’s skull, he will not be thereafter in the central field of my psychiatric interest—not that psychiatry might not grow from studying him.
ment of a strikingly isolated way of life, with such great social distance that one has to continue to deny oneself a great deal of useful, educative, and consensual validating experience with others, to circumscriptions of oneself on the basis of factors such as prejudice, caste, and class, if one happens to be in a very small minority.

But in a great many instances, the restrictions in freedom of living are very much more striking in the sharp circumscriptions of interest; large numbers of aspects of living are, as it were, taboo—one avoids them. Sometimes a compulsory restriction of living growing out of warp in the past is masked in the shape of pseudo-social rituals and interests which look like something quite different from a restriction. And these rituals seem to raise the person concerned above the level of the common horde and take on great distinction, at least to him and his ilk. The example I am going to give concerns devotion to games, and in this instance devotion to bridge. Since I got into quite serious trouble with a very distinguished and greatly respected anthropologist by this example of bridge, I judge that it has some power to fix interest, and so I will use it again. Now I have never played much of anything well; I think probably my vulgar taste is well handled by casino or hearts; certainly it isn’t anywhere near up to bridge. My example concerns a very select group of women in New York who have great socioeconomic opportunities. They do little each day but get out of bed and prepare for the bridge club, to which they repair with minimum talk to their husbands or chauffeurs and there spend many hours in a very highly ritualized interchange with their fellows, whereupon they are content with life and repair to bed again. I hope that you begin to get a notion of what I mean by pseudosocial ritual; in this case, each person is busily engaged with people, but nothing particularly personal transpires. I believe that most of these people would be willing to agree that it would be rather better—aside from considerations of displaying their clothing, and so on—if they could sit in cubicles with one-way screens directed toward the cards. There would be less distraction from people coughing and sneezing and so on, and they could therefore perform their function in life more comfortably. While this is an extreme example of pseudosocial ritual, there are a remark-

able number of people who have ways of being social as the devil without having anything to do with the other people concerned. They live by very sharply restricted rules.

Another of these restrictions in living is the development of ritual avoidances and ritual preoccupations. Regardless of your political leanings, you have probably all experienced with your confreres ritualized avoidance in matters of political thought. For example, this kind of avoidance might appear if you talked to your banker about the necessity for further New Deal legislation. To give a personal example, on the rare occasions that I get to a barber shop, I am duly shorn by a good fellow veteran of the First World War whom I cherish both because he is a very public-spirited citizen who does a great deal of welfare work, and because he is a good barber and keeps quiet. I so detest the business of having my hair cut that I wish to at least approach dozing, and conversation is extremely unwelcome. But one day as I was getting my hair cut, the radio had some tweet on about Henry Wallace, and the barber denounced Henry Wallace very succinctly. I remarked that, well, I knew the man and liked him very much. I feel that, like some of the rest of us, he is not always possessed of the most brilliant and far-reaching foresight, but he has occasionally had some remarkably good ideas, which is enough to give a person standing with me. It was not difficult after that to repose during the time I was in the barber chair. Five or six months later, when Henry Wallace was boosted out of the Department of Commerce, the subject came up again; in other words, it was an important matter. Now this barber has no real desire to quarrel with me about anything, but my comment about Wallace had disturbed part of his ritual avoidance machinery; and this disturbance was attached to me, since he’s got good enough recall to know how I disturbed him. And so the topic was developed further. But we still patronize each other for all that.

Now all these ritual avoidances and preoccupations give one a feeling that one is making some sense in an important area of living. Actually one is not making any sense at all, because one is completely inaccessible to any data. Besides the political, there is the ‘society’ aspect; here again great sections of life are closed off by supposedly rational definitions which, on careful scrutiny, turn
out to be simply ritualistic avoidances. The same is true in the world of art; and those who have dealt with natural and unnatural sciences may have noticed much the same thing at annual meetings and the like. And God knows the world is filled with ritual avoidances and preoccupations under the name of religion.

Of course, I can quite respect a person for being clear as to what he is interested in and what he is not particularly interested in. For instance, there is no earthly reason why I should be frantically interested in the theory of money. There is no reason on earth why I should labor to develop an aesthetic appreciation of painting, or of unnumbered other things in which I have only vestigial interest. I could not conceivably be adequately interested in anything like the whole field of internal medicine. But if no one can even talk to me about Dadaism, for instance, or the Baptists, or the theory of money, it is not because my life course has concentrated a great deal of my satisfaction and security in a particular field; it is because my security depends on avoiding a particular field or a particular subject. Life, I suppose, has never been all equally interesting to any one person or within the capacity of any one person. I am quite sure that as the primal horde came out of prehistory there was some specialization among the denizens; certainly there was specialization in the bearing of children, and such a specialization as that would surely call for further specializations. Ritual avoidances and preoccupations may superficially look the same as specializations, but they actually mean that you cannot enter a certain field; any interest moving toward that field immediately arouses anxiety which prohibits any further movement in pursuit of information.

Self-Respect and Human Maturity

From all that I have suggested you may see that it is no extraordinary use of inference to presume that self-respect is necessary for the adequate respect of others. There are many people who respect many people they don’t know, but that isn’t what I am talking about. It is safe to say that people who respect no one except people they don’t know do not respect themselves. And people who are very high in self-respect—that is, whose life experience has permitted them to uncover and demonstrate to their own satisfac-

tion remarkable capacity for living with and among others—are people who find no particular expense to themselves connected with respecting any meritorious performance of anyone else. One of the feeblest props for an inadequate self-system is the attitude of disparaging others, which I once boiled down into the doctrine that if you are a molehill then, by God, there shall be no mountains. In a good many ways one can read the whole state of a person’s self-respect from his disparagement of others. The disparagement is built of two ingredients, that which one ‘despises’ about oneself, and a great many not operations. Thus the person who greatly respects himself for his “generosity,” which is probably always of a very public character, finds an incredible number of people ungenerous, stingy, mean, and so on. I think it has been known from the beginning of recorded thought that a person who is very bitter toward others, very hard on his fellow man for certain faults, is usually very sensitive to these particular faults because they are secret vices of his own. Insofar as self-respect has been permitted to grow without restrictions, because of comparatively unwarped personal development or because warp of personal development has been remedied, there is no expense, no feeling of impoverishment, no hints of anxiety connected with discovering that somebody else is much better than you are in a particular field. It is lamentably true that in so highly specialized and intricate a social organization as almost any extant culture is, it is virtually certain that there are very few top figures in any complex operation. Most people are not as good as the very few, and many people are much worse than the average. But there is such an enormous field for living that one does not have to depend on what one is not good at, and therefore one has no particular need for keeping a bookkeeping record on how many people are worse in a field in which one is bad. But some people, because of certain warps in personal development, make this an outstanding operation, in order to reduce anxiety from invidious comparisons with others.

I should like now to say a few words about human maturity—a subject I always treat extremely casually, partly because it is not a problem of psychiatry, although it could be extrapolated from psychiatry. But the actual fact is that an understanding of maturity eludes us as psychiatrists who are students of interper-
sonal relations, for the people who manifest the most maturity are least accessible for study; and the progress of our patients toward maturity invariably removes them from our observation before they have reached it. Thus a psychiatrist, as a psychiatrist, doesn't have much actual data. But one can guess a few things. I would guess that each of the outstanding achievements of the developmental eras that I have discussed will be outstandingly manifest in the mature personality. The last of these great developments is the appearance and growth of the need for intimacy—for collaboration with at least one other, preferably more others; and in this collaboration there is the very striking feature of a very lively sensitivity to the needs of the other and to the interpersonal security or absence of anxiety in the other. Thus we can certainly extrapolate from what we know that the mature, insofar as nothing of great importance collides, will be quite sympathetically understanding of the limitations, interests, possibilities, anxieties, and so on of those among whom they move or with whom they deal. Another thing which can quite certainly be extrapolated is that, whether it be by eternally widening interests or by deepening interests or both, the life of the mature—far from becoming monotonous and a bore—is always increasing in, shall I say, importance. There is no reason to entertain for an instant the notion that it would be too bad to become mature, because then one might get bored to death; quite the contrary. It is certain that no person, whether mature or terribly ill, is proof against any possibility of anxiety or fear, or against any of the needs that characterize life. But the greater the degree of maturity, the less will be the interference of anxiety with living, and therefore the less nuisance value one has for oneself and for others. And when one is mature, anything which even infinitesimally approximates the complexity of living in the world as we know it today is not apt to become boring.