Etiology Of Mental Health

James Clark Moloney
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James Clark Moloney, M.D.*

Thirty years ago, when I first started post-graduate studies at the Henry Ford Hospital, it was not difficult to diagnose mental illness. It was simple, because at that time it was naively felt that the mentally ill fell into one or the other of two categories of psychopathy. These psychopathies were insanity in either sex and/or hysteria in women. Even then the caprices of the hysterical woman were viewed with skepticism. Most doctors doubted that she was sick at all. The hysterical woman was dubbed a prima donna, putting on an act, or she was accused of willfully forcing others to feel sorry for her. The medicos, reduced to helplessness by the hysterics calloused disregard for their best therapeutic ventures, were furious with her. Accordingly, as if she were a spoiled child in need of punishment, they dumped her into the lap of a psychiatrist, crying out in desperation:

"Another hysterical woman!"
The psychiatrists were bogeymen, waggled in the face of the hysterics, to force her into a state of therapeutic compliance.

But that was in the old days, when no one seemed to recognize that the so-called hysterical woman was performing in a fashion more human than was the man who, under identical pressures, grimly clenched his teeth, repressed his chagrin, and went stoically about the job of preserving the myth of masculine superiority. Men will be men! But, by being men, they blow out their coronaries, eat holes in their gastric mucosa, and burst their cerebral vessels. They die five years sooner than women, sacrificial victims to the god of masculine power.

Not so long ago there were seventeen peptic ulcers in men for every peptic ulcer discovered in a woman. Coronary thrombosis was a man's disease. And for that matter, among the psychopathies, crimes of violence—murder, or attempted murder—at one time paralleled the male-female statistics for peptic ulcer. However, since men have so effectively sold women on the fallacious proposition of the superiority of men there is one female murderess for every eight male murderers.

It is not to be deduced from these statistics that men are becoming more docile. Quite the contrary! Women are shedding their softer side to become more masculine. In this modern age they commit male crimes and they suffer male diseases.

The male way of life, a way forced upon him culturally by the traditions and covenants of occidental society, directs man to swallow his feelings. His type of psychic illness is spawned by this enforced alimentation of the indigestible elements of his milieu. Forced to swallow his chagrin, the anger derived from his frustrations is anchored in his tissue as well as in his psyche. Man is more responsible than woman for the birth of a new science—the science of psychosomatic medicine.

The difficulties attendant upon making a diagnosis of mental illness is increased in direct proportion to the possession of knowledgeable concepts of those diseases which anchor fear-rage in the tissues of the body. It is no longer cozy to make a sharp distinction between what is psychopathic and what is not psychopathic.

*Formerly, Division of Neuropsychiatry
At Present, Practicing Psychiatry, Detroit, Michigan
However, strange to say, modern psychiatry understands mental illness better than it understands mental health. Few authorities agree on the meaning of mental health. Some scholars, out of reverence for the traditions of Freud, naively contend that it means the wholesale conversion of the "constitutional ferocities of mankind" into socially acceptable activities. According to this Freudian definition, a healthy man "successfully" harnesses his "inherited rages" and "undesirable instinctal cravings." He sublimates himself. In other words, he somatizes his truculence.

Another set of social scientists, weighed down by ponderous statistical devices and inflexible systems of classification and methods of operating, arrive at their own specialized conclusions regarding character-structure. In so doing, they accept the most frequently occurring character-type as normal for the aggregate of human beings under study. These sociologists, using the statistical approach, would describe cannibalism as being normal—normal for the Mundugumor of New Guinea, for instance. To my mind, cannibalism is never normal, and even for the Mundugumor all we can say is that it is a statistically significant characteristic. There are myriads of similar instances of the statistical normal being used to replace what is considered, from a dynamic point of view, the actual normal. The branch of social scientists using this statistical device fractionate culture, rather than reveal its dynamics.

From the dynamic viewpoint, mental health can be described as adequacy in thinking and feeling at each stage of development. In its final development, mental health is an expression of the mature, adult mind which possesses adequate capacity for body mastery, appropriate memory of experiences, and a capacity for prompt and meaningful memory recall and intellectual activity. The mature adult in good mental health enjoys acuity in all the five senses, and is immediately ready with appropriate responses; he competently evaluates and relates himself to living and non-living objects, and accurately measures time and space.

But there are other confusions that add to the difficulties of arriving at comprehensive knowledge of mental health. Cliques have sprung up in psychiatry, the members of which advance the proposition that adaptation to the respective societal system constitutes normality.

But the societal system is not the same the world over. Without going into the essence of this implication, it might be said that what is psychologically good for the Canadian may be psychologically bad for the Cuban. What is good for the Japanese is unwholesome for the American. The wide variety of cultural "sets" provides a wide variety of obstacles to the establishment of psychiatry as an exact science. The ramifications of these complexities penetrate every department of human experience, since psychiatry deals with theory and practice, politics, espionage, sabotage, disciplines, penal systems, propaganda, ethics, crime, wars, plagues, economics, religion, industry, sociology and every other kind of "ology;" history past, present and future; mental health and mental ill health. In fact, psychiatry embraces the totality of living as experienced by human beings in every part of the globe.

This could be stated another way:

In America a man is "normal" if he conforms to the American way of life. In Russia a man is "normal" if he conforms to the Russian way of life. In Japan a man is "normal" if he conforms to the Japanese way of life. But these conformities to the
"ways of life" are emotional adaptations. At birth the American, the Russian, and the Japanese do not differ emotionally. Emotional differences are precipitated in the human individual by the pressures of his environment. The American social structure produces the American character type. The Russian social structure produces the Russian character type. The Japanese social structure produces the Japanese character type.

There are not only culturally induced differences in the psychology of individuals, but there are also culturally induced differences in psychiatry. Psychoanalysts have been preoccupied with this self-same problem.

Adequate adaptation to the cultural institutions and mores is often advanced by psychoanalysts as an evidence of psychoanalytic cure of a psychopathy. This would mean then that psychoanalytic cure in Afghanistan would be different from a psychoanalytic cure in Russia. A psychoanalytic cure of a Mundugumor in New Guinea would produce a different personality structure than that produced by the psychoanalytic cure of a Balinese, on the island of Bali. The cure of an Englishman in England would be different from the cure of a Japanese in Japan. In each of these instances the standard of measurement for cure is cultural adaptation. It would seem that such psychoanalysts virtually equate cultural adaptation with maturity. In other words, according to such authorities a person is mature when he adjusts to his native culture. I think this an error.

Sociologists often err in the same manner as do many psychoanalysts. Sociologists, for example, contend that the institutional format of England is normal for the English—a similar position regarding the Japanese method of rearing children. They support the rigid societal system of the Japanese is normal for the Japanese. They even go so far as to say that English child-raising techniques are normal for English children because these techniques fit the child for the English way of life. These same sociologists assume a similar position regarding the Japanese method of rearing children. They support the method because they contend that the Japanese method of child rearing fits the Japanese child for the Japanese way of life.

To shed more light on the subject of culture-personality, I will excerpt a quotation from the work of the noted anthropologist, A. Irving Hallowell:

"When we have more knowledge of the range and variation in the human personality structure in relation to major provincial determinants we shall be able to state with more precision what is common to many everywhere. By that time we may be able to construct a better picture of the psychobiological structure of man as an evolving primate . . .

"Man's world became one that was not simply given. It was constantly moulded by his interaction with it. Through the manner in which he represented it to himself it further became meaningful to him. But once a particular cultural system became established, a mode of life to which future generations had to adjust became perpetuated. The individual was forced to make his personal adjustment to live by means of the symbolic system provided by his society."

Douglas Haring put it this way:

"An underlying hypothesis of the recent anthropological-psychoanalytic studies, sans technical jargon, may be summarized briefly. With due allowance for physical and
regional limitations and for cultural history, the unique aspects of any society are determined and maintained by emotional habits learned in infancy by a majority of the participating individuals. Much of this learning occurs before the infant learns to talk. Consequently, a variety of socially-important emotional habits continues vague and indefinite, even unconscious, throughout every individual's lifetime. One knows only that certain types of social situations are congenial and he feels at home in them, while in other situations he is ill at ease, even violently disturbed. The experiences of early infancy, reinforced by subsequent events have developed in him unconscious criteria of social and cultural choice. Such preferences one takes for granted, despite fluent rationalizations, the ultimate criteria of his personal and social preferences lie beyond his ability to perceive objectively and to describe verbally."

These quotations could be supplemented by many, many other quotations similarly couched. They are representative of the trend in the thinking of a host of sociologists, anthropologists, psychiatrists, economists, and educators.

A social scientist, if sufficiently mature, maintains an unbiased attitude toward social scientists from other cultures. A mature mind is enriched by the different qualities of humaneness that occur in people from other parts of the world. In fact, it is conceivable that if all the earth's personnel achieved maximum maturity there would be no variation in cultural configurations. Social differences and racial prejudices would cease their side-by-side existence. Unfortunately this solution to our problem will be a long time in coming.

Even after recognizing the significance of syncretic conformity to cultures in this occidental society, we regularly encounter in adults infantile components that are disturbingly inoperable and are well nigh ineradicable. More penetrating studies of the childhood of the adult are indicated to clarify the multiple reasons for the built-in infantilisms so often demonstrable in the cultural pattern of the American occidental.

In my investigation of the origins of perpetuated infantilisms I might add that the child that controls, bosses, influences, startles, or wangles the important people in his life does so because he is afraid of them. His emotional disturbance may not be a neurotic accent. His bossy tantrums are his way of defending himself against fears. The fears that demonstrate abnormal insecurity in the child are, for the most part, connected with real unwholesome or series of real unwholesome occurrences that stemmed from his mother's injudicious, smothering neglect, or alternating smothering and neglecting care of him. Because his mother mismanaged him, he distrusts her. Because the mother deceived him, he no longer believes in her. Because he loses confidence in his own mother, he loses confidence in himself and in everyone else.

This child during a critical infantile period in his life felt that his mother had abandoned him, or he felt that she had scheduled him, bossed him, smothered him or hurt him. He felt that she had robbed him of his prerogatives. She denied him his birthright. She stifled his curiosity, prevented his development, and disrupted his rhythms.

This beggared his understanding. Finally his mother's unsympathetic attitude meant to him that she did not love him. He argues: "Mother does not love me. She uses me. She resents me. She lies to me. She smothers me. She deserts me. She takes away my

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privileges. She does not like my way of growing up. She wants me to grow up her way. She is not safe. I cannot rely on her.” And this does not exhaust the list of complaints against the mother.

Actual experience has dramatically taught us that if the child goes unloved for too long a time during some phases in his life cycle, he arrives at a most devastating conclusion. He concludes that he is unloved because he is unlovable.

Our culture is artificially rigged to support this catastrophic conclusion. Despite the mother’s culturally induced deceit and culture-bound inadequacies, gaudy and giddy campaigns, if not commercially incited at least commercially exploited, are forever being launched to sanctify, to epitomize, to deify, to concretize, to immortalize the symbolic role of mother. In this day and age these campaigns are a must. They must bolster the modern mother’s preposterous pretensions. And these silly pretensions are reinforced by such slogans as: “Mother knows best.” “A child should be seen and not heard.” “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” Such disciplinary attitudes are most inimical to the materialization of the child’s sense of self-respect.

The unloved child who feels unloved because he is “unlovable” is stalked by a pervading sense of insecurity. This suspense is intolerable. In pursuit of relief he adopts methods of behaving that ignore the heart, that ignore love. To be precise, he vacates the field of love for the field of power. He puts his faith in the will to power as a means of providing security for himself. This decision of power at any price, compounds his insecurity and casts him into a maelstrom of the most vicious of vicious circles. He finds himself inspired, then haunted by a new ghost. To survive, it is necessary for him not only to be powerful, but to be ALL POWERFUL. He must get his own way at all costs.

In our culture, these so-called recalcitrants do not constitute the exception to the rule. Disturbed children are the rule. If the culture gets in its best “licks”, these balky colts are forced to conform. If the disciplinary measures of the culture are ineffectual, these balk colts become balky men. If but mildly balky, they are dubbed eccentric. If radically balky, they are called criminal psychopaths, or they are classified insane. Between these two cadres are many nuances of social maladjustment. But those that conform to society by an initial harnessing of their recalcitrant infantilism may break down at a later date, may break down at any time a social or an economic straw breaks the camel’s back. Those that rigidly and consistently conform to society wind up with psychosomatic diseases.

Regardless of the culture into which the individual is born—ego growth (that outgrows infantilism) is the growth of the self. Is this an unachievable ideal?

Growth of the self implies self expansion, flexibility, self-respect, creativeness, appropriate generosity, appropriate sustenance of effort, adequate industry, and withal self growth implies an effective capacity for communicating with others. In all, self growth is growth that works toward as complete a maturation as possible within the limits of the original potential endowments. An ego or self adequately developed will find it unnecessary to become abnormally dependent or to become abnormally independent. One might express this as an ideal concept, as a desideratum.
The emotionally mature person is a person who is properly contained within his own skin. He is a person who has fully developed his ego boundaries and his skin boundaries without those boundaries being blurred or partially obliterated by containing unintegrated elements of the mother image. These unintegrated maternal memory elements blur the proper memory of the ego boundaries because of some unresolved bitter precognitive experience or experiences that occur in the early "togetherness situation" with the mother. However, I am not going to discuss this aspect of maturity. Suffice it to say that if the individual possesses an uncontaminated memory and an uncontaminated picture of his own skin then he will have achieved maturity. I refer those readers who desire further enlightenment on the subject to the works of Paul Schilder, Paul Federn, Willie Hoffer, Clifford M. Scott, Karen Machover, Moloney, et al. This idea of measuring maturity by assaying the adequacy of body image is not too meaningful to most of the casual students of sociology and it has not achieved the popularity that it deserves.

For the purposes of this paper, however, it will be more effective to return to a descriptive review of the subject of emotional maturity. Normal emotional adultness has been described as adequacy in thinking and feeling for every stage of development. But this definition is too circumscribed. It requires further elaboration. This elaboration should include most of the cardinal prerequisites of emotional maturity. Self respect is first on this list. Self respect has been called by other names, such as integrity, self-esteem, and self-confidence. They all mean the same thing. Shakespeare expressed this beautifully when he made Polonius say, "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night follows the day that thou canst not then be false to any man." Without probing any more deeply into the matter, it is enough to say that if a man is true to himself, if he has a proper feeling of inner worth, it will not be necessary for him to destroy his fellow man. Further, because of his inner strength, he will find himself capable of helping his fellow man who is less fortunate than himself in the possession of self-esteem.

But self-respect is only one characteristic of emotional maturity. I will enumerate some other attributes without attempting to go into more detail. This enumeration is somewhat of a repetition but it is a subject that bears repetition. The emotionally mature person possesses adequate flexibility, adequate generosity, adequate creativeness, and adequate industriousness. He is neither a slave to dependency nor a slave to independency.

It is not enough to explain the meaning of ego development. It is also necessary that each element entering either directly or indirectly into the promotion of ego expansion be adequately assayed if we are to gain any understanding of the meaning of the process.

In stating our thesis with respect to the promotion of ego growth, we spoke of "properly measured mothering from a relaxed loving mother." Emmy Sylvestor has highlighted the necessity for the mother to keep abreast of the infant's needs. The infant requires unconditional maternal love from motherly mothers, but it is at no time implied that such love can be of the stifling variety. An apt descriptive phrase has come into being in this connection, the expression "smother love." The recommendation that the child should receive unconditional mothering during the first two years of its life
has, in some quarters, given rise to some opposition. Such opposition has occurred and is still occurring in those quarters in which there has been some misunderstanding of the meaning of unconditional love during the first two years of life. This misunderstanding is largely due to the fact that few people in our culture are free of unconscious bias toward natural child rearing. They are rendered insensitive because of their own unresolved emotional attitudes toward the subject. For example, it is still asserted by some that mothers must have their freedom even if it means the sacrifice of the child's emotional health. It is also frequently asserted that the child needs to experience responsibility and frustration if it is to undergo proper development. It is therefore recommended that frustration commence early, while the infant is still in the crib. Unconditional love is regarded with both alarm and distaste as encouraging the child to grow into the ways of licentiousness and indiscipline. It is argued, if his bestial original sins are not curbed, he will grow into a problem, troubled and troubling, and unfit for association with his fellow man.

However, to refute this error it is enough to say that it is now understood that the child is not born with destructive drives. The destructive tendencies develop subsequently as reactions to frustrations put upon him by the significant persons who conditioned him. Furthermore, it is also known that the lack of proper maternal love in the first two years of the child's life may cripple and distort his psychological development. It is necessary to know such facts about emotional development before one can understand the meaning of Sylvester's advice concerning mothering.

Perhaps this point could be illuminated by citing, as an example, the child's first efforts to obtain a drink of water. The glass sits on the tray before him. It is three-quarters full of water. He reached out clumsily in his attempts to grasp the glass. He is awkward and his attempt is misdirected. A mother versed in the child's needs will allow him to toil with the glass until he looks in her direction and signals that he needs her help. Rushing prematurely to the child's assistance, merely because she cannot stand to have water or milk splashed on her rug or because she cannot stand disorder, is unfortunate insofar as the child's ego development is concerned. If the mother cannot tolerate the free, expansive, unpredictable movements of her child, then she is not affording her baby the proper quality of mother love. This mother smothers her child. She interferes with the child's rhythms, with the child's internal penchant for expansiveness-for-growth. This seeming over-indulgence is not an act of kindness nor an evidence of understanding the child's needs. Let it be said at once that every child, as part of his method of acquiring knowledge, must feel free to expand and to investigate. He must satisfy his curiosity whenever it is safe for him to do so.

It will not be inappropriate to point out that mothers sometimes err in still another way. For example, they may neglect to assist the child in his attempts to manipulate the glass of water after he has become exhausted by his own efforts. If the child looks to the mother for help, especially after he has made a heroic struggle to help himself, the mother should without delay come to his aid.

Hence, the proper measure of maternal love means neither too much nor too little loving support for the child at any stage of his development, but the proper disbursement of it in relation to the child's needs.
There is a point to this whole discussion of emotional maturity. If a human being does not achieve emotional maturity, he is frustrated. If he is frustrated, he is frightened and enraged. Sometimes the rage is concealed beneath his placid facade, but it is there nevertheless, and it is searching for a target. That target might be any innocent bystander. A nation of individuals of similar immaturity might well unloosen their massed angers upon another nation as a target for their angers. The existence of such a pool of angers underwrites war.

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In the construction of this paper, excerpts from the following were used:

* The Battle for Mental Health. (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1952.)
* Brochure on Understanding the Japanese Mind. (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1953.)
* Unpublished paper entitled Fear: Contagion and Conquest.
* A subcommittee report to the International Committee for the American Psychiatric Association on “Corresponding Membership in the American Psychiatric Association.”
* “The Will to Power and the Use of Deodorants.” Paper read before the Central Neuro-Psychiatric Association in Detroit, Michigan, on October 8, 1954.

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