

Book Reviews

Etiology of Schizophrenia

Abnormalities in Parents of Schizophrenics. A Review of the Literature and an Investigation of Communication Defects and Deviances. STEVEN R. HIRSCH and JULIAN P. LEFF. Oxford University Press, New York, 1975. viii, 200 pp. \$20.95. Institute of Psychiatry Maudsley Monographs, No. 22.

One of the major hypotheses guiding research into the etiology of schizophrenia is that there are peculiarities in the communication styles of the patient's parents and that these contribute significantly to the development of the disorder. This hypothesis has been presented in various forms. Bateson's notion of the "double-bind" and Lidz and Fleck's concept of "marital schism," for example, are variants of the view that parental communication with the child forms a basis for the later schizophrenia.

The obvious problem with this hypothesis is that it is unwise to deduce causes from correlations. It is at least as plausible a conclusion that the behavior of a child with preschizophrenic characteristics leads to communication anomalies in parents as it is that the reverse is true. If we wish to assign an etiological role to these anomalies, it is necessary to show that they antedate the appearance of behavioral deviance in the child. This can be done convincingly only through longitudinal observation of children at risk for schizophrenia. A weaker strategy, but a useful one, demands the selection of control groups of patients with severe non-schizophrenic behavioral deviations and with childhoods as difficult and atypical as those so often found in the histories of adult schizophrenics. Controls of normal adults or neurotic adult samples are essentially irrelevant to the main question.

Hirsch and Leff, British psychiatrists at the Institute of Psychiatry, London, have written their monograph in two parts. The first is a clear and comprehensive review of the main literature reporting on the search for psychological abnormality in the parents of schizophrenic patients. It covers five general classes of research, investigations that employ, respectively, clinical case study methods, questionnaires, group interactions, tests of abnormal thought process, and measures of deviant language and communication.

In the second half of the volume, the authors report an attempt to replicate the work conducted at the National Institute of Mental Health by Margaret Singer and Lyman Wynne, who, they believe, "have made the most promising contribution to this field of inquiry." The essential findings of the NIMH group were that the parents of schizophrenic patients exhibited deviancies of communication in responding to the Rorschach technique. These deviancies are coded according to a detailed manual. Wynne has reported that the technique discriminates satisfactorily between parents of schizophrenic patients and parents of neurotics, and between parents of schizophrenics and parents of normal controls.

Underlying this technique is a fundamental hypothesis. This is that the parental style of communication is characterized by disruptions, vagueness, irrelevance, and lack of closure; this, in turn, is assumed to impair the child's ability to focus attention, for the parental communication style is itself unfocused and lacking in direction. (We can note, parenthetically, that there is good reason to suppose that a deficit in attentional focusing is a major factor in schizophrenic pathology. It is not at all clear that it can be attributed to parental communication styles.)

Using the Singer and Wynne manual, Hirsch and Leff investigated the responses of the parents of 20 schizophrenic patients and of 20 neurotic patients. Their sample of schizophrenics' parents was selected with reference to explicit criteria; groups were matched for educational and social class of the parents. There was considerable exchange between the investigators and Singer aimed at establishing congruence between their and her use of the Rorschach scoring categories.

Suffice it here to say that this study basically failed to confirm the findings of Singer and Wynne. It did emerge, unsurprisingly, that the proportion of "deviant" communications uttered tends to increase with the verbosity of the speaker. The fathers of schizophrenic patients turned out to be unusually verbose—but not the mothers. When this confound was handled with suitable covariance techniques, the differences between the parents of the two groups van-

ished. The authors discuss the possibility that the failure to replicate might lie in differential diagnostic standards, differential sampling within the category of schizophrenia, and other methodological discrepancies. They do, however, point out that Singer and Wynne did not control for verbosity and that this might account for much of the discrepancy in outcomes. This is a valuable study. The reader cannot help wondering, however, why it was not published in an appropriate journal rather than embedded in a monograph of predictably more limited circulation.

Any serious student of the psychopathology of schizophrenia will profit from reading the initial literature review. The weaknesses of much of the reported research are indicated dispassionately. It is a matter of more than passing curiosity that the adherents of the family-etiology hypothesis are so often content with poor experimental design, global judgments of patients by investigators with prior knowledge of and enthusiasm for the hypothesis at test, failures to control for obvious confounds, and inadequate matching with control samples. Hirsch and Leff document these problems in concise fashion; they also point out the almost universal failure on the part of the family-etiology theorists to consider the possibility that the anomalies of parents and their schizophrenic offspring might arise from a genetic basis.

This volume makes a valuable contribution to the scientific study of this important problem.

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Issues of Informed Consent

Catastrophic Diseases. Who Decides What? A Psychosocial and Legal Analysis of the Problems Posed by Hemodialysis and Organ Transplantation. JAY KATZ and ALEXANDER MORGAN CAPRON. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1975 (distributor, Basic Books, New York). xx, 274 pp. \$10.

Catastrophic Diseases focuses upon ways in which medical decision-making can be broadened to offer maximum protection for human subjects as well as maximum clarity of policy issues. Katz, a professor of law and psychiatry at Yale, and Capron, a law professor at Pennsylvania, have previously collaborated on an important volume on human experimentation (a casebook entitled *Experimentation with Human Beings*) and