

CHAPTER 3

INTERPERSONAL AND SYSTEMIC THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

STEVEN N. GOLD AND GONZALO BACIGALUPE

CHAPTER OUTLINE	
Conceptions of Personality 57	<i>Sullivan's Influence</i> 67
Harry Stack Sullivan's Interpersonal Theory 58	From Interpersonal to Systems Theory 67
<i>Personal Influences</i> 58	<i>General Systems Theory</i> 68
<i>Basic Concepts in Sullivanian Interpersonal Theory</i> 59	<i>Family Therapy Founders</i> 70
	Conclusion: From Systems Theory to Social Constructionism 75
	References 77

CONCEPTIONS OF PERSONALITY

The spectrum of theories of personality represents a range of accounts and explanations of the phenomena constituting personality development, processes, and functioning. Even more fundamentally, however, each personality theory differs in its conception of what personality *is*. Certain theoretical viewpoints even question or dispute whether personality, in the sense of a force that controls and directs intentions and actions, *exists*. Perhaps the best known instance of such a perspective is that of B. F. Skinner (1957, 1971), who argued that behavior is controlled not by the person or personality, but by the environmental consequences of the person's behavior.

The interpersonal and systemic constellation of personality theories has, throughout its evolution, explicitly questioned the notion of personality as a force that guides, shapes, and explains behavior. Interpersonal and systems theorists maintain that human behavior is not adequately accounted for solely by the workings of the personality of the individual. They have argued that forces beyond the personality and outside the control of the individual either contribute to, or more or less exclusively direct, behavior. More specifically, interpersonal and systems theorists contend that behavior is controlled, at

least in large part, by the social environment in the form of interpersonal influences and social systems

This chapter will delineate the conceptions of personality proposed by interpersonal and systems theories by tracing their historical development. The evolution of these theories is marked by an ongoing dialectical controversy regarding the relative degree of causation attributable to interpersonal and interactional as opposed to individual forces in determining behavior. All interpersonal and systems theorists claim that, at least to some extent, interactions with others and with various social systems direct behavior and shape experience. At the extreme, some of these thinkers have argued that personality and personal individuality are not useful clinical constructs (Haley, 1980, 1987; Minuchin, Montalbo, Guerney, Rosman, & Schamer, 1967; Sullivan, 1950; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967) and are psychological fictions or illusions.

HARRY STACK SULLIVAN'S INTERPERSONAL THEORY

Harry Stack Sullivan is, in many respects, one of the most mysterious and curious figures in the history of personality theory. His contribution to basic issues in personality is one of major importance, and his contemporaries were in awe not only of his ability as a theorist but also of his perceptiveness and skill as a therapist (Havens, 1983; Kvarnes & Parloff, 1976; Perry, 1982). However, much of his private life and personal history have remained obscured by his own seclusiveness and secrecy (Perry, 1972, 1982). As early as the 1920s, Sullivan was forging a conceptual transition in explaining behavior, from the personality of the individual to interaction among persons. Despite his psychiatric training in medical and psychoanalytic concepts, his theory drew most heavily on formulations from the emerging social sciences. The social science perspective, exemplified by the work of Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), and Sapir (1921), viewed the individual's sense of self as being the product of social interactions and experiences.

Others more extensively trained in a psychoanalytic framework than Sullivan, such as Karen Horney (1937, 1939, 1950) and Erick Fromm (1941, 1962, 1970), were similarly shifting their focus from intrapsychic forces to interpersonal forces. Sullivan, however, most closely anticipated and most directly influenced the conceptual frameworks developed further by systems theorists in the 1970s and 1980s (Hoffman, 1981; Reiss, 1981; Rosenblatt, 1994; Selvini-Palazzoli, Cecchin, Prata, & Boscolo, 1978), which continue to guide clinical research through the present day (Selvini-Palazzoli, Cirillo, Selvini, & Sorrentino, 1989; Stanton, Todd & Associates, 1982). We have chosen to focus on Sullivan's model, therefore, not only because it exemplifies interpersonal theories, but also because it is most directly connected to later systems theories.

PERSONAL INFLUENCES

Sullivan's emphasis on the role of interpersonal experience in the development of personality was related to significant restrictions in his own social background and functioning (Perry, 1982). Sullivan was frank in acknowledging his interpersonal awkwardness and social discomfort. Several early life circumstances contributed to major gaps in Sullivan's knowledge of social conventions and in his acquisition of social skills. He grew up on a rel-

actively isolated family farm in upstate New York with no siblings and with parents who were, for that era, unusually late in child bearing. His mother was thirty-nine years old when he was born and had given birth to two older sons each of whom died well before their first birthdays. Other than contacts with relatives, his parents seemed to be segregated to a considerable degree from the larger, primarily Protestant, community by virtue of their humble social status as Irish-Catholic immigrants of modest financial means. By the time Sullivan entered grade school at the age of five and one-half, his Irish brogue, bookishness, and limited previous contact with other children severely hampered his acceptance by schoolmates and assimilation into the community of other children. Consequently, Sullivan's alienation from others persisted throughout his childhood and adolescence.

Even in adulthood, his discomfort with social situations contributed to an interpersonal distance from others and was exacerbated by his homosexuality (Perry, 1982) in an era when homosexuality was considered a diagnosable psychological disorder. Influenced by the conventional wisdom of his era, Sullivan viewed his own sexual preference as pathological and an impediment to full adaptive functioning and integration into adult society. His low estimation of himself, exacerbated by his negative attitudes about his own sexuality, along with his escape into extensive hours of work contributed to his maintaining a relatively isolated lifestyle.

Yet another personal influence on Sullivan's work, apparently, was his own experience with psychological disturbance. Although not widely known, even among his close colleagues, as a young man he had suffered a schizophrenic breakdown and had been hospitalized (Perry, 1972, 1982). This is particularly significant since Sullivan's early work as a psychotherapist through which he came to prominence was with schizophrenic young men seen in a hospital setting. Apparently his first-hand encounter with and resolution of a schizophrenic breakdown provided him with special insight into these patients, the origins of their problems, and how to help them overcome their difficulties (Kvarnes & Parloff, 1976; Perry, 1982; Sullivan, 1974).

It may seem paradoxical that someone who acknowledged his own considerable interpersonal limitations and difficulties devised a theory that emphasized the crucial role of interpersonal experience and functioning in personality development and adaptation. In fact, there is substantial evidence that it was Sullivan's very awareness of his own deficits in personal and social functioning, and his attribution of these difficulties to his restricted exposure to interpersonal learning experiences during his growing up years, that led him to emphasize the importance of the interpersonal realm in his theory of personality (Perry, 1972, 1982). In his writings, sometimes in disguised and other times in direct fashion, he employed examples from his own life to illustrate how psychological problems originate in and are perpetuated by unfortunate, inhibiting, or restrictive interpersonal experiences.

BASIC CONCEPTS IN SULLIVANIAN INTERPERSONAL THEORY

Interpersonal Conception of Personality

Sullivan's theoretical work represents a perspective that was not only vastly different from the way personality was viewed by most of his contemporaries, but also is at variance with conventional conceptions of personality that continue to dominate current popular culture. When we think of personality, we are in the habit of thinking in terms of the individual

person. The biases of thought and perception prevalent in our society lead us to think of people as being self-directed individuals, choosing and being responsible for their own beliefs, attitudes, motivations, actions, and feelings.

Interpersonal theories of personality explicitly contradict these assumptions. They contend, based on several lines of reasoning, that personality is properly understood as an area of study not of individual persons but of *interpersonal situations* (see, e.g., Sullivan, 1930–1931, 1948, 1950). *Personality* from this perspective is defined by Sullivan (1953a) as “*the relatively enduring pattern of recurrent interpersonal situations which characterize a human life*” (pp. 110–111; italics in original). Alternately stated, he conceived of personality as being composed of the consistent ways in which an individual *interacts with other people* over time.

Sullivan proposed that personality (a) develops primarily in response interactions with other people, (b) is only observable as it manifests itself in interpersonal situations (i.e., interpersonal interactions), and (c) can only be effectively understood through observation of and participation in interaction in the interpersonal realm. Humans, Sullivan (1950, 1953a, 1956, 1972) argued, are born human *animals* and only full develop into human *beings* through the assimilation of culture via interpersonal interaction. He emphasized that it is through the acquisition from others of language, customs, traditions, conventions, expectations, viewpoints, and so on, that a human infant develops into, learns to function as, and becomes recognizable as a *person*. Moreover, he contended that even after it is achieved, maintaining “personhood” is dependent upon continued interaction with the social environment in a manner analogous to the dependence of the body on a particular physiochemical environment for biological survival (Sullivan, 1950). He pointed out in this regard the deterioration of uniquely human capacities that occurs even in relatively capable and well-adapted people in response to social isolation. “*A personality,*” Sullivan (1953b, p. 10; italics in original) stated, “can never be isolated from the complex of interpersonal relations in which the person lives and has his being.”

From this perspective, idiosyncratic differences in personality are primarily a reflection of the unique set of socialization and acculturation experiences encountered by each individual. Sullivan (1953a) emphasized the many local variations that exist within the larger culture. Each particular family, for example, transmits its own unique set of customs, traditions, and viewpoints to its members. The corresponding diversity in socialization experiences results in a wide range of possible patterns of personality functioning within the same culture.

However, Sullivan (1950, 1953a) seemed to have felt that there was an excessive and unproductive preoccupation on the part of psychiatrists and personality theorists with studying individual differences. He strongly believed that human functioning was most productively understood by studying what individuals have in common rather than idiosyncratic differences among them. This perspective is summed up in what Sullivan (1953a) referred to as his one-genus postulate, that is, that “*everyone is much more simply human than otherwise*” (p. 32, italics in the original).

A related concern of Sullivan’s was his conviction that much of personality theory was marked by unscientific conjectures about the private experiences of the individual. To the extent that the study of personality aspired to be scientific, he insisted, it must concern itself with phenomena that are observable. He claimed that the proper realm of study for those wishing to investigate personality was the public realm of interpersonal interactions

(Sullivan, 1953a). Implicit in this viewpoint is the assumption that it is erroneous to believe that one can observe interpersonal interaction in a disengaged way; the interpersonal realm can only be studied, Sullivan asserted, through interaction itself. He referred to this method of investigation as *participant observation*.

The Role of Anxiety in Personality Functioning

In interpersonal theories, socialization, the process by which the human infant develops into a person, is inextricably intertwined with the experience of anxiety. It is primarily in order to avoid the distress associated with the experience of anxiety that the individual is motivated to incorporate and subscribe to the viewpoints, tenets, expectations, and abilities endorsed and transmitted by the larger society, according to Sullivan. Sullivan (1948, 1953a) proposed the existence of a continuum of experience, the hypothetical end points of which are *euphoria*—the absence of anxiety—and *uncanny emotion*—intense pervasive anxiety. He employed the term *uncanny emotion* to indicate that experiences colored by the most extreme forms of anxiety are so overwhelming that they cannot adequately be conveyed in words. This is a crucial observation, he indicated, because a cardinal characteristic of anxiety is that it disrupts concentration and awareness. Consequently, anxiety tends to interfere with clearly identifying the circumstances that provoked it, which in turn impedes effectively relieving anxiety. The more sudden and severe anxiety is, the more likely it is to disrupt the capacity to remove it.

Sullivan believed that anxiety has its origins early in life in the infant's interactions with its primary caretaker, using his term, with the *mothering one*. While acknowledging his inability to adequately account for the mechanisms by which it occurs, he proposed that "*the tension of anxiety, when present in the mothering one, induces anxiety in the infant*" (Sullivan, 1953a, p. 41; italics in the original). He refers to this phenomenon as *empathy*. He grounded this conjecture in the observation that when the primary caretaker is distressed, even when that distress is not directed at the infant, interaction between the mothering one and the infant culminates in observable signs of emotional disturbance and behavioral disorganization in the infant.

Sullivan (1950, 1953a) suggested that disapproval of the infant's behavior by the mothering one comes to be associated with anxiety by the infant. He pointed out that much of the mothering one's behavior in relation to the infant is governed by cultural expectations that have been conveyed to her regarding her social responsibilities to the child (Sullivan, 1953a). She adheres to these expectations due to concern that failure to do so will earn the disapproval of others. In situations in which she anticipates that others may disapprove of her handling of the infant, she is likely to become anxious. Because her anxiety empathically induces anxiety in the infant, the mothering one's concern about being disapproved creates anxiety in the infant. The disruptive effect of anxiety on the infant's functioning makes the mothering one more anxious that she will be criticized about her handling of the baby, which in turn increases the likelihood of her expressing disapproval toward the infant.

In this fashion, during the course of development, anxiety comes to be associated with the disapproval of those (referred to by Sullivan as *significant others*) whose esteem is important to one. Consequently, the process of socialization is fueled by the infant's, and later the child's, desire to avoid the disapproval of significant others in order to be spared the discomfort of anxiety. By adulthood, the anticipation of disapproval by significant others comes

to be the more common source of anxiety. Anxiety, therefore, in marked contrast to Freud's formulation, is located in interpersonal relationships rather than intrapsychic conflicts.

The Function of the Self-System

The concept of the self proposed by Sullivan differs in several respects from the conventional, common notion of self and from that found in many other theories of personality. Although in earlier forms of his theory he employed the term *self* (Sullivan 1972), he later replaced this with the term *self-system* (Sullivan, 1953a; 1953b; 1956). The adoption of the term *self-system* more explicitly conveys his notion that the self is not a static entity, structure, or being, but rather an active process, or *dynamism* (Sullivan, 1953a; 1956; 1972). At earlier points in the development of his theory, therefore, the term *self-dynamism* was used by Sullivan (1953b) to refer to the same construct that he subsequently came to call the self-system.

Sullivan's concept of the self, or self-system, contains an inherent paradox. We tend to think of the self as the aspect of personality that most distinctly embodies the *unique* identity of the *individual*. According to Sullivan (1950; 1953a), however, the self, including the sense of individuality and uniqueness, is a product of interpersonal experience and social influence. The self-system is constructed out of our perceptions of other people's reactions to us or, to use the term Sullivan (1953b) borrowed from Mead (1934), from *reflected appraisals*. One can think of the term *reflected* as implying that other people function in effect as mirrors that provide us, through their reaction to us, with various images of ourselves. This idea is very closely related to the notion that the human animal becomes a human being as a result of socialization or interaction with others. While it may seem strange at first to consider that the aspect of personality that we think of as being most unique and individualized—our sense of self—is a product of social experience, it becomes clearer when one tries to imagine developing a self-concept and a sense of self in the absence of social interaction. It is difficult to identify a component of what one would consider the self—beliefs, attitudes, goals, perspectives, habits, patterns of behavior—that is not in some fashion learned from or influenced by other people. Moreover, the term *appraisals* indicates that it is what we perceive as others' evaluations or estimations of us, that is, the degree to which they approve or disapprove of us and our behavior, that shapes the self-system, how we view ourselves.

As already discussed, Sullivan proposed that anxiety is elicited primarily by the anticipation of disapproval by significant others. He used the term *security* to refer to the relative absence of anxiety, making it in effect a shorthand term for *interpersonal security*, because it reflects the degree to which one feels free of concern at any given moment that one will encounter disapproval. However, Sullivan (1953a) also stated that "by security I mean one's feeling of self-esteem and personal worth" (p. 267). Probably in order to convey that *interpersonal security* and *self-esteem* refer to the same phenomenon, Sullivan often used the term *prestige* almost interchangeably with these two terms. What we consider most unique, individual, and separate about a person—the self—is for Sullivan (1950, 1953a) not individual but interpersonal in nature. The self-system is shaped by the approval and disapproval of significant others, and its function is to maintain self-esteem by avoiding anxiety.

There are two major strategies through which the self-system avoids the experience of anxiety (Sullivan, 1953a). The first, and more obvious one, is to avoid what one antic-

ipates will elicit the disapproval of significant others and to do what one believes will win their approval. This is the process that mobilizes socialization—the acquisition of values, beliefs, behaviors, roles, and so on, endorsed by the larger society. The second more subtle but strikingly pervasive way in which the self-system avoids anxiety is by not allowing those things that might elicit disapproval to fully register in awareness. In this manner, aspects of personality that would challenge one's view of oneself and thereby threaten one's self-esteem elude recognition. As a result, the self-system is relatively impervious to change.

Sullivan (1953a, 1956) used the term *selective inattention* for the self-system process that most commonly is invoked in controlling awareness. It is very different from Freud's concept of repression (Sullivan, 1956) because selective inattention is a more complex and subtle process than forgetting or blocking material from awareness. It is a matter of directing the focus of concentration. Rather than constituting not knowing, it is a phenomenon of not noticing. Sullivan (1953a, 1956) emphasized that we are actually aware of events that are subjected to selective inattention. However, when something is selectively unattended to, it does not register in focal awareness. As a result, the implications and significance of the event are overlooked. Such paradoxes of simultaneously knowing and not knowing were beginning to be studied in Sullivan's day in the New Look in perception, and are addressed contemporarily by work on implicit cognition (Barone, Maddux, & Snyder, 1977; see Chapters 9–10.) Sullivan (1953a) used the following anecdote about a soda fountain clerk at a drugstore that he frequented to illustrate these features of selective inattention:

He showed a very rare collection of hostilities to customers, so that whatever you asked for, he would dutifully, when he got around to it, bring you something else. Having suffered from this repeatedly, I was extremely unpleasant on one particular occasion and said, "What is that, huh?" And he said, "Water. Didn't you ask for it?" And I said, "*Get me what I asked for!*" Whereupon the poor bird tottered off under the unpleasantness and got me what I had asked for. But the great joker [sic] is that the next time I saw him he grinned at me and immediately got me what I asked for. (pp. 319–320; italics in the original)

This story nicely depicts the paradoxical quality of selective inattention: When an event is subjected to selective inattention, one is in some sense genuinely not cognizant of it, or at least oblivious to its significance, but is at the same time in a very real sense aware of it. This dual quality of incidents to which selective inattention is applied accounts for the remarkable regularity with which the clerk managed to bring customers the wrong item, apparently without recognizing this to be the case.

In rarer instances an even more extreme and extensive process than selective inattention, *dissociation*, is employed by the self-system to avoid anxiety (Sullivan, 1953a, 1953b; Mullahy, 1953b). In contrast to material that is subjected to selective inattention, incidents that are dissociated *are* excluded from awareness. Items to which selective inattention has been applied can enter focal awareness under certain conditions, for example, when mentioned at an opportune moment by a trusted person whose intentions are perceived as benevolent. Dissociated material, however, is not recognized as part of the self-system even when one is confronted with evidence of its existence. It arouses a much greater level of distress than the anxiety that selectively inattended material elicits, discomfort at the level of uncanny emotion. Dissociated experiences, therefore, are even more unlikely to be acknowledged and reintegrated into the self-system than experiences to which selective inattention has been applied.

Due to the effects of selective inattention and dissociation, the self-perceptions that comprise the self-system are highly resistant to modification (Sullivan, 1948, 1950, 1953a). Having arrived at a perception of oneself that one is convinced will meet with the approval of the significant others in one's life, one clings tenaciously to this self-image in order to avoid anxiety. The sense of uniqueness, individuality, and power invoked by the use of the word *I*, the felt need to protect one's self-esteem, the desire to preserve the prestige and respect one believes one receives from others, all contribute to the determination with which one maintains one's current view of oneself. The self-system in attempting to elude the disapproval of significant others and therefore to avoid the discomfort of anxiety inhibits opportunities to recognize and benefit from observations that would lead to improvement in one's ability to function effectively in interpersonal relations.

For Sullivan (1953a), the self-system's efforts to avoid anxiety constituted a mixed blessing. On one hand, the desire to receive the approval of significant others and avoid their disapproval is the major force that motivates the individual to undergo the intricate learning processes comprising socialization and acculturation. Just how crucial this mechanism is becomes clear when one considers that these processes include the assimilation of language and all the other complex performances required to respond effectively to the appreciable demands of functioning within a particular human society. As with other knowledge structures, such as Piaget's (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969, 1971) *schemas* and Kelly's (1955) *constructs*, another aspect of the self-system's concern with avoiding anxiety is that it can have a significant inhibitory effect on learning. It tends to screen out recognition of data inconsistent with its current understanding and perspective or when assimilating such data to distort it. Sullivan (1953a) invoked this tendency, which he refers to as the *theorem of escape*, to account for the observation that people often persist in the same patterns of behavior despite the fact that they have repeatedly proven to be ineffective, and that efforts to intervene by directly pointing this out to an individual rarely are productive because they are likely to be ignored, discounted, or explained away. Dollard and Miller (1950), George Kelly (1955), and other personality and clinical theorists of the time employed terms such as *the neurotic paradox* and *the impereability of constructs* to refer to this phenomenon.

The Developmental Eras

The strength of the tendency of the self-system to avoid change is considerable but far from absolute. The countervailing tendency of the self-system to develop in response to socializing influences is most powerful with the press of newly matured needs or capacities that signal entry into each new developmental stage or eras (Sullivan, 1953a, 1953b, 1972). Although his names for these eras imply their correspondence to chronological periods (e.g., infancy, childhood, early adolescence), he explicitly pointed out that a particular individual who is chronologically an adult can function primarily at an "earlier" era. Although the preoccupations and patterns of behavior of each era initially arise at the chronologically labeled period, failure to master an era's interpersonal skills significantly hampers advancement to subsequent levels of functioning despite progression in chronological age. Sullivan (1953a) indicated that "arrest in the juvenile era is not by any means an extraordinarily unusual developmental disorder among people in this culture and in these times" (p. 279).

Sullivan's (1953a, 1953b, 1972) detailed account of how the self-system develops from infancy through adolescence is a cornerstone of his theory. It is through the interper-

sonal influence of significant others that one evolves from human animalhood and acquires the innumerable patterns of behavior that characterize a human being's later development. His description of this process provided many specific examples of how he applied the theoretical constructs discussed thus far to understanding the individual as a product of social interaction indivisible from his or her interpersonal environment.

Although Sullivan (1953a) provided a more intricate description of infancy than any of the subsequent development eras, we will not cover it in detail here because the concepts he introduces in discussing this period are too intricate to adequately explain in this chapter. In infancy, interpersonal interaction is governed by the principle labeled by Sullivan (1953a) the *theorem of tenderness*, which proposes that the manifestation of needs (e.g., to be fed, diapered, and soothed) by the infant elicits *tender cooperative behavior* on the part of the mothering one. Her ministrations constitute the infant's first interpersonal experiences and the foundation for its transformation from human animal to human being. The emergence of the subsequent developmental era, however, represents a momentous shift in the very nature of interpersonal interaction.

The Childhood Era. From childhood onward, social interaction is no longer guided by the interpersonal patterns encompassed by the theorem of tenderness. Sullivan (1953a, 1953b) equated the onset of childhood with the emergence of language. With this growing capacity for communication, the child is more accessible to social influences; a new principle of interpersonal interaction, Sullivan's *theorem of reciprocal emotion*, becomes predominant. This theorem, also termed the *theorem of reciprocal motivation*, states that "*integration in an interpersonal situation is a reciprocal process in which (1) complementary needs are resolved, or aggravated; (2) reciprocal patterns of activity are developed, or disintegrated; and (3) foresight of satisfaction, or rebuff, of similar needs is facilitated*" (Sullivan, 1953a, p. 198; italics in the original). This theorem makes explicit that activities and outcomes in interpersonal encounters are not under the control of any of the participants but rather are a function of the interactive, reciprocal processes between them.

As the child progresses through this era, an increasing degree of active cooperation is expected from him or her—initially by the mothering one, later by other family members, and still later by others outside the family as the circle of social contacts widens—in mastering the numerous prescriptions of the culture in which he or she is growing up. Sullivan (1950, 1953a) emphasized that as a group these cultural prescriptions are extremely complex, are not logically deducible from a single or a few guiding principles, and are often mutually inconsistent or contradictory. Even those prescriptions for which there is a logical basis are inculcated in the child long before he or she has the capacity to fathom the reasoning underlying them.

Since the acquisition of these principles is motivated by the desire to win the approval and avoid the disapproval of significant others, the child learns early on how to conceal transgressions from authority figures and thereby deceive them. Most remarkably, the ability to deceive authority figures is often taught to the child by the authority figures themselves in the form of verbalisms and personae. These are, respectively, statements and self-presentations that are ingenuous but enable one to avoid the disapproval of others and therefore the consequent anxiety (Sullivan, 1953a). A common example of a verbalism is the statement that children are commonly taught to make, "I'm sorry." Children are routinely and explicitly taught to make this statement long before they are capable of grasping

its meaning. They do learn, however, that making it at the appropriate time will regularly allow them to avoid the disapproval of authorities.

The Juvenile Era. The transition from childhood to the juvenile era is signaled by the emergence of the need for interaction with peers (Sullivan, 1953a, 1953b, 1972), which coincides approximately with the age at which formal school begins. One of the most important aspects of this era is its potential to act as a corrective for potentially problematic patterns of interpersonal interaction acquired within the family. Indulged children, for example, who do not readily attend to others' needs and wishes and who expect others to cater to them, often learn to adjust these expectations in the company of peers during the juvenile era. Moreover, exposure to peers and the opportunity to "compare notes" with them during this era promote the realization that there are many variations in perspective and prescribed behavior beyond those learned in one's particular family. In this way, the particular rules and viewpoints transmitted in one's family can be more readily recognized and questioned.

Two major patterns of interpersonal interaction pervasive in social dealings in the school years are learned in one's dealing with peers in the juvenile era: competition and compromise. Sullivan (1953a) notes that people whose functioning remains "chronically juvenile" in character tend to approach interpersonal situations by reflexively attempting either to get the advantage of other people or to win their approval.

The Preadolescent Era. Entrance into the preadolescent era is marked by a shift in one's interpersonal orientation away from preoccupation with getting one's own needs met in one's dealing with others to concern with the needs and sense of well being of a particular same-sex peer, the *chum* (Sullivan, 1953a, 1953b, 1972). Sullivan identifies this shift as the first approximation of love, a relationship in which the needs and emotional comfort of another valued person take on more or less equal importance with one's own. An important developmental aspect of the chum relationship is its promoting validation of personal worth in each of its participants through their mutual identification of self-interest and self-evaluation with the interests and valuation of the other. Individuals who enter preadolescence with considerable difficulties but who manage to enter into a chumship can leave this era with a markedly increased capacity for effective interpersonal relating.

The Early Adolescent Era. Sullivan (1953a) defines the early adolescent as beginning with the emergence of the capacity for lust (i.e., genital sexuality) at puberty and culminating in the establishment of a patterning of sexual behavior. With the dawning of the capacity for lust, attention shifts from chumship to members of the opposite sex. Implicit in this assertion is Sullivan's assumption, pervasive in his era, that homosexuality constituted a form of maladjustment. For Sullivan, homosexuality represented a failure to make a developmental progression onward to a heterosexual orientation.

Sullivan (1953a) described in detail the many factors that complicate and form impediments to the early adolescent's efforts to achieve an adequate capacity for emotional intimacy and sexual adjustment with the opposite sex. Prominent among these obstacles he identified are those endemic to American culture, such as the double standard of morality and widespread prohibitions against sexual experimentation among adolescents. These cultural factors compound the inherent complexity of sexual adjustment created by the many ways in which the needs for the satisfaction of lust, of intimacy, and security can "collide" with each other. Achieving a workable pattern of sexual behavior, in other words, requires doing so in a way that simultaneously promotes closeness without arousing appreciable anxiety—a considerable challenge. This challenge is frequently further compounded when

early sexual encounters between relatively inexperienced adolescent partners go poorly, increasing their anxiety, lowering their self-esteem, and augmenting the probable development of various patterns of sexual dysfunction.

The Late Adolescent Era. Sullivan (1953a) stated that the culmination of early adolescence and progression into late adolescence occurs when a person arrives at a preferred patterning of genital activity, that is, "when he discovers what he likes in the way of genital behavior and how to fit it into the rest of his life" (p. 297). He refers to the status attained when one has transcended late adolescence as maturity. Although he does not make the point explicitly, his use of the term *maturity* seems to refer to the capacity to function effectively on an adult level as distinguished from the chronological attainment of adulthood. Psychological adjustment is equated with the degree to which one's level of development is consistent with one's age, and developmental level is above all reflected in one's level of interpersonal functioning. Sullivan (1953a) contended, therefore, that "each of the outstanding achievements of the developmental eras that I have discussed will be outstandingly manifest in the mature personality" (p. 310). Among the more conspicuous aspects of maturity noted by him are well-developed capacities for intimate and collaborative relations with others. A hallmark of maturity is sufficient self-esteem and freedom from anxiety to enable attentiveness and responsiveness to the insecurities and divergent perspectives of one's intimate and associates. Moreover, the mature person's comparatively high degree of security allows for interests to be explored and extended relatively unhampered by a concern with maintaining the current status of the self-system to avoid the anxiety that might be aroused by changes in perspective.

SULLIVAN'S INFLUENCE

Sullivan's interpersonal theory represents a dramatic shift away from Freud's intrapsychic model of personality. Our emphasis here has been on the ways in which it constituted a precursor to later systems theories. However, Sullivan's contribution to contemporary psychology is much more extensive and multifaceted. By explicitly delineating processes extending beyond infancy and childhood, he anticipated subsequent extensions of developmental theory to adolescence, adulthood, and aging. His recognition of the influence of relationships outside the family, particularly friendships, on the developing personality of the child prefigured contemporary research in that area (e.g., Youniss, 1980). Moreover, his emphasis on the role of interpersonal as opposed to intrapsychic forces in individual psychotherapy foreshadowed very recent trends in psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theory and practice (see Chapter 2).

FROM INTERPERSONAL TO SYSTEMS THEORY

Sullivan emphasized the interpersonal nature of psychological problems in his theory. However, he continued to rely on individual psychotherapy, the dyadic interaction between therapist and client, as his primary mode of intervention. Several years after his death many of the implications of his interpersonal model for the practice of psychotherapy was more fully explored by what would come to be known as the *family therapy movement*. This group of therapists and theorists, some inspired by Sullivan (Broderick & Schrader, 1991)

and others by cybernetics and other systems theories that originated outside of psychology, developed radically new approaches to treatment.

Several founders of the family therapy movement, although not directly influenced by Sullivan, shared with him having had substantial exposure to schizophrenic disorders. Through this experience, they arrived at the conclusion, as had Sullivan, that interpersonal forces play a major role in the development of personality and psychological problems. Carl Whitaker, one of the early and most creative innovators in the field of family therapy, also had been schizophrenic as a young adult (Neill & Kniskern, 1982). Whitaker (1958) and other pioneers in the family therapy movement had in common with Sullivan the experience of working extensively with schizophrenic individuals in a hospital setting. In an attempt to account for their observation that the functioning of some schizophrenics improved markedly while in the hospital only to deteriorate rapidly after discharge (Ruesch & Bateson, 1951), they began meeting with the patients along with their families (see, e.g., Jackson, 1968a, 1968b). They concluded that disordered modes of interaction and communication within the family created and maintained many schizophrenics' difficulties. (This interpersonal formulation of a generation ago has been eclipsed by the position in contemporary psychology that schizophrenia is caused by biochemical rather than social forces [e.g., Gottesman, 1991; Lindenmayer & Kay, 1992; Weiner, 1985].)

Family therapists concur with Sullivan's view that interpersonal contexts play a key role in the formation and functioning of the personality. However, they differ with Sullivan in focusing more on the interactions among people than on the impact of those interactions on the individual. Consequently, they hold a more optimistic view of the human condition (Neill, 1982) than Sullivan's description of human development as a process culminating in personality patterns that are strongly resistant to change. They intervene to transform the family system's existing patterns of interaction rather than the individual's historically determined patterns of behavior. What follows is an overview of the evolution of family and systems theories that centers on how the origins and main assumptions of these models challenge the usefulness of concepts such as personality and individual personhood in explaining behavior in general and mental disorders in particular.

Systemic family therapists focused on the family rather than on the personality of an individual as the unit of analysis and intervention. Mainstream psychological concepts such as personality traits and the entire notion of personality were rejected in some of the early systemic theories. In its place, the interactions among the members of systems were employed as explanatory constructs. Family therapists have employed this level of analysis to account for the existence of patterns of behavior and their resistance to change. In addressing the issue of behavioral stability within the family, systems theory parallels personality theory's attempts to account for continuity in an individual's behavior patterns over time.

GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY

General systems theory was the result of efforts by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968) and sociologist Walter Buckley (1967) to investigate the principles common to all complex entities. It is the transdisciplinary study of how a phenomenon is organized independent of its specific components and location (Heylighen & Joslyn, 1992). Von Bertalanffy and Buckley postulated that an observer could formulate the rules that account for the functioning of interconnected parts. "This thinking represents a fundamental change

from focusing on content, material substance, and the distribution of physical energy to considering pattern, process, and communication as being the essential elements of description and explanation" (Guttman, 1991, p. 42).

Systems are open organizations in continuous interaction with their environments. A family can be represented as a system, its parts being the individual members who create a whole by virtue of their interaction. Through the lens of systems theory, a family is viewed as a network of interactions among its members rather than as an aggregation of individual member's characteristics. Von Bertalanffy (1968) contended that the way the parts are organized determines the system's identity, which is independent of the particular characteristics of each part. A system's identity is created by the interaction of its parts rather than their individual content.

Systems do not exist in a vacuum. Families, for example, are in constant engagement with larger systems, such as the local community, the educational system, the legal system, and the state (Auerswald, 1968; Imber-Black, 1988; Schwartzman, 1985). Families, like all systems, have boundaries that protect them from being disrupted or destroyed. Boundaries are defined by family rules and determine who is part of a family and who is not. They govern the incoming information and the communications transmitted outside the system. What is known about the family by nonmembers and shared with each member within it, for instance, will be affected by the family's boundary-regulating function.

Systemic theories are critical of approaches to the mind, such as the individual personality theory, that reduce it to an independent entity. Initially, interpersonal theorists emphasized the interactive nature of human behavior. Members of a system were seen as constantly affecting and being affected by each other in a mutual, multidirectional fashion. This point of view automatically called into question the justification for assuming that any particular member's perspective is more accurate or legitimate than any other member's. Bateson (1972) said, "The observer must be included within the focus of observation, and what can be studied is always a relationship or an infinite regress of relationships. . . . Never a 'thing'" (p. 246). Bateson's remark is reminiscent of Sullivan's concept of participant observation.

In the early systemic writings, the observer is still perceived as being able to detect an objective reality existing independent of him or her. In the second wave of systems theory, the observer is conceived of as creating his or her viewpoint via interaction with the observed rather than as a neutral, external, objective witness who takes note of the interactions between others (Bateson, 1979; Maturana & Varela, 1984; von Foerster, 1981). Later developments in systems theory have questioned viewing personality as an independent entity that can be captured in language by an objective observer. Systems theorists argue that language is not a passive representation of an external objective reality. It constitutes, rather, an active creation of socially defined reality. "Reality" from this vantage point is built up through negotiation among people, resulting in the creation of multiple social realities in which people participate (Gergen, 1994).

In contrast to mainstream psychology's view of individuals' personalities as being independent and relatively constant entities, systems thinking views individual behavior as being shaped by the dynamics of the family system. Variations in the person's behavior are seen as a function of the interactional and contextual environment in which the person is positioned. Frequently, the most important life context for persons is the family of origin or their current family situation. In a systemic framework, a person is not seen as a "freestanding" and constant entity; constancy reflects the degree of consistent patterns of interaction within

the system (Rosenblatt, 1994). Description of these interactions, as opposed to account of their potential effect on the individual's behavior or identity, predominates in the writings of systemic authors. In a clinical context, a systemic practitioner may prefer to describe a clinical problem, such as an eating disorder, by describing family process and structure and the functional familial aspects of the disorder rather than personality characteristics of the person exhibiting the eating disorder (e.g., Minuchin, Rosman & Baker, 1978).

Systemic theorists contend that human interaction is complex and cyclical, and that individuals attribute diverse meanings to communicational events occurring in their families. Systems theory explains behavior in a cyclical as opposed to a linear, cause-and-effect fashion. People attribute meaning to their behavior and that of others. This attribution of meaning, called *punctuation*, varies depending on the point in the interaction where the person chooses to focus her or his attention. This process highlights the cyclical characteristic of any interactive process. From a systemic perspective, what other theories would consider an individual's "personality" is a reflection of the patterned interaction among family members (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967) and the punctuation of others (Keeney, 1982; Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967). During a family conflict, for example, each participant in the family (or therapeutic system) will adopt a divergent perspective and thus describe and/or explain the problems differently and act accordingly. The systemic perspective construes these punctuations as being a function of the part the person is playing in the family. This approach also assumes that human beings have the capacity to analyze the context in which interactions occur. Consequently, people have the capacity to *metacommunicate* or make comments about their own communication and punctuation.

FAMILY THERAPY FOUNDERS

Family therapy as a treatment modality and a philosophical viewpoint has relied heavily on systems theory for a conceptual framework. The family therapy movement grew out of mounting frustration among some clinicians with what they perceived as limited effectiveness of individual-oriented psychotherapies. The family context was considered by them to provide a better perspective from which to understand the development of psychological difficulties. This perspective tends to view the personality of the individual as a product of the interactive workings of the family. In this respect, family therapists adopted the idea of circularity as a central guiding construct in assessing and resolving problems that had traditionally been attributed to the workings of personality. Hoffman (1981) wrote:

If one saw a person with a psychiatric affliction in a clinician's office, it would be easy to assume that he or she suffered from an intrapsychic disorder arising from the past. But if one saw the same person with his or her family, in the context of current relationships, one began to see something quite different. One would see communications and behaviors from everybody present, composing many circular causal loops that played back and forth, with the behavior of the afflicted person only part of a larger, recursive dance. (pp. 6-7)

Circularity in communication was among the fundamental concepts derived from observations made in the study of families that had a member diagnosed as schizophrenic. Family therapists came to perceive the disordered behaviors constituting schizophrenia as emerging from dysfunctional patterns of interactions within the family. In contrast to the long-standing focus of the mental health field in the Western world on the inner workings of the individual psyche, the new family therapy field focused on communication as be-

havior among family members. This conceptual shift has been described as a transition from psyche to system (Neill & Kniskern, 1982).

During the 1950s, several therapists across the United States began working within this framework. The most influential groups were those inspired by the work of mental health professionals such as Nathan Ackerman and Don Jackson and social scientists such as Gregory Bateson (Gurman & Kniskern, 1981, 1991). Ackerman, a child psychiatrist, began to meet with families and educate others about the advantages of seeing the family when there was a child with behavior problems or psychological difficulties. The most influential journal in the field, *Family Process*, grew out of collaboration between Ackerman on the East Coast and in the Midwest and Jackson on the West Coast.

Ackerman and Psychoanalytically Influenced Family Therapy

Ackerman (1970) differentiated psychoanalytic and family therapy treatment without rejecting either, highlighting the pragmatic aspects rather than theoretical implications of the newly emergent family therapy approach. He criticized the biological biases and mechanistic and genetic reductionism of individually oriented psychoanalysis and relocated pathology in interactions between family members rather than the individual. This conceptual change removed conventional individual therapy's isolation of the patient from the family and of the family from the analyst. The psychoanalytic approach, Ackerman wrote, "focuses on the internal manifestations of disorder of the individual personality . . . [while] family treatment focuses on the behavior disorders of a system of interacting personalities, the family group" (p. 7). His stance was consistent with systemic theory's focus on interactional patterns among family members generated by their relationships as opposed to an emphasis on the personality characteristics of each member. He proposed that in their interaction family members not only learn specific values and norms of the system but also *learn how to learn* them. Human beings, then, learn how to learn in the context of interaction, a concept that Bateson (1958, 1972) used prominently and developed further in his early theorizing. The central role of this process parallels the function of socialization as highlighted by Sullivan and other interpersonal theorists (Fromm, 1941; Horney, 1937).

Ackerman (1970) sought to integrate his psychodynamic practice with family therapy; he asserted that a shift toward health in family relationships is not an inevitable product of psychoanalytic treatment. "In fact, it is by no means rare that following psychoanalytic treatment of one family member, there occurs a paradoxical worsening of family relationships" (Ackerman, 1970, p. 8). While behavioral change in one family member could elicit positive changes in other members, it more than creates a context within which they discount the change and subtly coerce the changing individual to return to previous patterns of behavior. A family system creates an identity or organization that is ultimately beyond the control of the particular individuals, even though they may have helped create or modify the system to which they belong. Ackerman wrote that if therapeutic gains were to stabilize, the whole family system would have to modify its ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling about a problematic situation.

Although the unit of analysis changed from the individual to the family, mental thinking about cure and psychopathology did not change dramatically except that now there might be more than one individual in the therapy room. Ackerman and other *transgenerational family therapists* (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Bowen, 1978; Framo, 1976;

Whitaker, 1958) have emphasized the evolving nature of family systems, and how family organizations transcend the therapeutic focus on the present interaction. If systems are constituted and maintained through time, pathology is "contagiously passed down from one generation to the next" (Ackerman, 1970, p. 8). Pathology is transmitted across generations via the system's enduring influence over its members' patterns of behavior. For this reason, Ackerman and other transgenerational family therapists suggested that clinicians be alert to the movement of a "pathogenic conflict" or disorder across three generations.

Ackerman started to use systemic ideas while retaining psychodynamic concepts in his model of treatment. For instance, he wrote about the mechanism of defense, a psychoanalytical concept that originated in individual psychotherapy. However, Ackerman introduced the idea of defense as operating the level of the system to explain how families protect themselves from the anxieties arising from conflict. He believed that defenses emerging from the inner psyche of an individual interrelate with those generated in the family context. Family defenses are a shared form of avoiding conflict, a diversion from the group task of facing anxiety. If the defenses break down, the essential family functions become progressively and selectively disabled. Within this framework, families develop selective ways of confronting their developmental tasks and conflicts that may include the deployment of defenses. If those defenses are not available, the conflict can erupt, destroying the overall family organization. A family member in individual therapy would not be able to override the family system's defenses; the individual's identity is so intimately tied to the family's organization that he or she could not maintain individual gains.

For example, a misbehaving child could be seen from a systemic viewpoint as fulfilling a need on the part of the family to project "badness" or "rebelliousness" onto a particular member so that the rest of the system can disown those qualities. Evidence of improvements in the individual child's behavior would tend to raise anxiety in the family system and therefore be ignored. Instead of recognizing and acknowledging positive changes, the family would continue to search for opportunities to perceive and label the child's behavior as negative. If this strategy failed, another member of the family would be assigned the role of the "scapegoat" or "black sheep."

Ackerman (1970) formulated a series of therapeutic guidelines that highlighted the use of the therapist's self as a fundamental clinical tool. His explicit use of the concept of the therapist's self links interactional-system theories with the interpersonal model postulated by Sullivan. Acknowledging the existence of the therapist's self implies a recognition of the individual personality as a single entity, even in the context of a systemic framework. In Ackerman's perspective, a therapist utilizes his or her own self to foster healthier relationships among family members. The therapist "mobilizes those forms of interaction that maximize the opportunity for undoing distorted percepts of self and others, for dissolving confusion, and clarifying the view of the salient conflicts" (Ackerman, 1970, p. 12). The therapist "injects into the family something new, the *right* emotions and the *right* perceptions in place of the wrong ones. Crucial to the entire effort is the breaking down of anxiety-ridden taboos against the sharing of vital family problems" (Ackerman, 1970, p. 12). Ackerman (1981) advocated that the therapist inject into the family more honest, meaningful, and genuine kinds of interactions, both verbal and nonverbal. These "right" feelings and analytical observations would give the family a new way of releasing some of its emotions in a safe context via "selective gratification of valid emotional needs" (Ackerman, 1981, p. 17), conflict resolution, and expanding the repertoire of interpersonal abilities.

Ackerman considered psychoanalytic treatment a more specialized approach because of its "unique access to disturbances which have their source in the unconscious mental life" (1970, p. 14). Family therapy, in contrast, approaches conflict by considering it in the broader context of multiple and embedded relationships. In delineating psychological problems and treatment, Ackerman breached the self-referential features of psychoanalytic dogma by adding (as did Sullivan) interpersonal events—the conscious organization of experience, reality, the present, and the group—to the explanatory concepts of intrapsychic dynamics, unconscious forces, fantasy, the past, and the personality of the individual. Family therapy provides strategies for assessment and treatment of "interacting personalities."

Traditional psychoanalysis has dealt with the patient as an isolated, individual personality. The psychotherapist working in this tradition believes that healthy readaptation occurs as a consequence of transforming the inner workings of the individual personality. The family therapist emphasizes moving from the outside inward, changing the context in which interactions occur and expecting that changing those interactions will elicit changes in the individual's patterns of behavior. The psychoanalytically oriented therapist focuses on moving from the inside outward: the therapeutic change in the inner dynamics of the personality are expected to impact favorably on the individual's interpersonal relationships.

Jackson, Bateson, and the Palo Alto Group

Jackson (1970), the founder of the interactional school of family therapy, believed that "individual personality, character, and deviance are shaped by the individual's relations with his fellows" (p. 111). From a vantage point similar to Ackerman's, Jackson wrote:

Symptoms, defenses, character structure and personality can be seen as terms describing the individual's typical interactions which occur in response to a particular interpersonal context. Since the family is the most influential learning context, surely a more detailed study of family process would yield valuable clues to the etiology of such typical modes of interaction. (p. 112; italics added)

Jackson, a psychoanalyst by training who was supervised by Sullivan for three years, redefined in communicational terms the notion of "ego function" as the "capacity to discriminate communicational modes" (Sluzki & Ramson, 1977, p. 45). For instance, in the case of a person diagnosed as schizophrenic, the capacity to interpret internal and external messages is weakened. The person's symptoms are "learned in the same way that people with more ordinary habits appropriately learned theirs, accommodating to the interactional demands of family life" (Sluzki & Ramson, 1977, p. 46). Therefore, the unit of diagnosis must include the interpersonal environment in which the identified patient lives and cannot be limited to a particular behavior. To accurately evaluate a particular behavior, Jackson, argued, as did Sullivan and Ackerman, that one must take into consideration the interpersonal milieu in which it occurs. Jackson's (1968b) writings about family homeostasis, the tendency to find equilibrium through maintenance of the status quo, described the capacity of systems to maintain stability even if their members attempt changes. Families may attempt to maintain a balance by resisting change or countering changes with dramatic shifts, thus preventing the evolution of a more adaptive or creative pattern. A family therapist could detect a particular family dysfunction and aim to catalyze change at the level of the system while taking into account the context in which it exists. A classical example is the one in which a young adult develops schizophrenic symptoms at the time of departing from

home to lead an independent life. From a systems perspective, the schizophrenic symptoms emerge in order to maintain stability in the family. This conjecture is supported by the observation that the parents who have been in conflict and on the verge of separating routinely come together to help the "ill" offspring. When their child starts to recuperate, the parents threaten to separate, and the cycle starts all over again, unless there is an intervention that highlights the developmental context in which the "symptoms" appear.

Gregory Bateson, an anthropologist, was a communication researcher with whom Jackson began to collaborate in 1954 (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1976). From 1952 to 1962, the Bateson communication project contributed to a new understanding of schizophrenia, which made a lasting impact on the emerging family therapy field. Bateson (1958) in his book, *Naven*, explored the perpetuation of a culture, a concept analogous to the continuity of personality over time or a family's continuing organizational stability. Bateson was also interested in how logical classes and paradoxes operate in interpersonal communication. For instance, the sentence "I am lying" provides serious difficulties in interpretation if no other frames are offered from which to evaluate its "truthfulness." As Haley (1976) explained, "a particular center of controversy was whether the question of truth and untruth, so dear to the logician's heart, was relevant to the analysis of human communication" (p. 61). The metacommunicative difficulties of discussing "crazy" communications like "I am lying" were compared to the difficulty schizophrenics might have in dealing with others while maintaining schizophrenic behaviors.

Jackson studied schizophrenia as a communication pattern rather than as an intrapsychic characteristic. Jackson founded the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California, collaborating with several others who became pioneers in the family therapy movement, including Bateson, Jay Haley, Virginia Satir, and John Weakland (Sluzki & Ramsey, 1976). Jackson was recruited by Bateson, Haley, and Weakland as a clinical consultant on the basis of his experience working with schizophrenic clients. Although Bateson was always associated with the Mental Research Institute, he maintained his independence because of the clinical emphasis the Mental Research Institute had from the beginning. Jackson's interest in the interpersonal aspects of schizophrenia contributed to the formulation of an interactive theory to explain the maintenance of schizophrenic behaviors.

The primary explanatory hypothesis that the Palo Alto group developed was the *double bind* construct. The *double bind*, a term coined by Bateson in 1954 before it was tested, is a hypothesis about what could have happened in the family life of the schizophrenic to account for his or her confusion about the meaning of family communications. It posits that this confusion emerges in an emotionally significant relationship from recurrent experiences in which the receiver of the message has been (a) exposed to two contradictory messages about the same behavior, (b) cannot leave the situation, and (c) is prevented from commenting about it. For example, the patient may repeatedly be told to be quiet about a family secret, not to lie when outsiders ask about the family, and not to comment on the contradictory nature of the message, while being forced to remain in the situation. In sum, whatever the client does will be seen as faulty and deviant. The concept of double bind came to be used to analyze many forms of communicational pathologies and difficulties besides schizophrenia (Jackson, 1968a, 1968b; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967).

Bateson's work in conjunction with that of the Mental Research Institute redefined schizophrenia as being comprised of patterns of interactions within families as opposed to an illness of an individual person. Schizophrenia was conceptualized by them as "an at-

tempt to cope with ongoing family communication characterized by recurring double binds" (Segal, 1991, p. 172). Although the Bateson's group emphasized the interactive aspect of human communication, they also wrote about the "ego function" as the "process of discriminating communicational modes either within the self or between the self and others" (Bateson *et al.*, 1976, p. 44). Constant exposure to double bind communication would prevent a person from accurately assigning the correct communicational mode to messages received from other persons and to the inner workings of the self.

Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland (1976) emphasized the idea of communicational context as a guide to discriminating normal from abnormal. This concept permeated the discussion of systemic therapists for decades following their seminal work. In 1962, at the end of the research project, they were cautious about the capacity of the double bind hypothesis to explain schizophrenia: "The double bind is a necessary but not sufficient condition in explaining etiology" (Bateson *et al.*, 1975, p. 42). However, their emphasis on relational context rather than on the perception and affective states of the individual has been lasting. It was a ground breaking study in its understanding of how human behavior is interactionally created and maintained.

CONCLUSION: FROM SYSTEMS THEORY TO SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Interpersonal and systemic approaches constituted critical reactions to the modern Western notion of personality as a stable structure that can be discovered, isolated, described, and analyzed through psychological evaluation or treatment. The contemporary notion that the self can be objectively investigated is the culmination of a very long and complicated historical process (Foucault, 1979). Interpersonal theorists and systemic family therapists reacted against the assumption of the existence of a unified personality that controls and directs behavior. They anticipated the *postmodern* sensibility that views the self as continually changing in response to constantly shifting relational contexts. These postmodern perspectives view the self as being redefined through a continuous revision of the story about who we are, where we come from, and how we experience other people. These viewpoints, referred to as constructivist theories, challenge to some degree the possibility of having access to an objective reality that exists independently of the observer. Constructivists are more interested in the practical utility of personal constructions than in identifying an objective reality "out there" (von Glaserfeld, 1987). This position was influenced by family therapy research—in part due to its use of the one-way mirror to observe families and clinicians interacting during therapy sessions. This procedure helped teams of observers to "step outside" of these interactions and identify processes at the systemic level, promoting the development of a stance that stressed the necessity of external observers in order to capture accurately the relationship between the system and its context.

Constructive perspectives have evolved into diverse branches that include cognitive constructivist and social constructionist theories. These theories have emphasized the observer as creator of the reality he or she is investigating (Bateson, 1979; Maturana & Varela, 1984; von Foerster, 1981). One form of constructivism emphasized developmental processes of the individual and intersects with Kegan's (1982; Rogers & Kegan, 1991) self-object relations theory and Piaget's (1970) cognitive developmental theory. From their perspective, at

different stages in people's development, they evolve new cognitive structures that redirect their mode of interaction with the context in which they live. Knowledge structures are transformed as part of the interaction between the individual and the environment, and as more complex forms of observation are developed. As a result, the person continues to construct "more epistemologically powerful (i.e., inclusive, viable or integrated) ways of making sense out of the world" (Lyddon, 1995, p. 79).

The origins of several family therapy developments have been linked to the ideas of the so-called radical constructivists. Included are some of the family therapy founders, such as Watzlawick (1990), who pose the idea that "no reality extends beyond the individual's experience" (Rosen, 1996, p. 6). Family therapists influenced by this approach have concluded that no independent objective family system exists. Any given family is not an objective entity but a construct whose membership, rules, and other dimensions of identity, organization, and functioning will be viewed divergently by various individuals and clinicians. This position differs from other constructivists (e.g., Kelly, 1955; Mahoney, 1991) who acknowledge the existence of a world and "how we arrive at that knowledge" (Rosen, 1996, p. 11). Constructivists in the family therapy field assume that "to understand any realm of phenomena, we should begin by noting how it was constructed, that is, what distinctions underlie its creation" (Keeney, 1982, p. 21). For instance, Jorgenson (1991) found that families in an interview with a researcher "fashion an identity for the interviewer" (p. 210). At the same time that the therapist develops notions about the family that affect their response to him or her, the family is creating a view of the therapist that similarly shapes his or her behavior and, therefore, their ongoing relationship.

Social constructionists focus on the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves). This theoretical approach attempts to clarify how people understand the past, present, and future in the context of history and their life circumstances (Gergen, 1985); that is, they focus on people's stories about others and themselves. Therefore, in this framework, our personalities, frequently conceptualized as socially defined *identities*, emerge through a process similar to the one authors engage in when they produce a written text. For social constructionists, knowledge is actively built up by interacting communities rather than passively encountered and observed by isolated individual persons. These ideas bring forth a salient distinction between cognitive constructivists and social constructionists. For social constructionists, assumptions about the nature of being (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology) are construed in the relationship among individuals, not in the structure of the mind or the "reality" of the world.

The social constructionist turn emphasizes the *storied* nature of human beings (Sarbin, 1986). Our lives are permeated by the process of meaning making through language and by our engagement with others in a continuous process of "storying" the world and ourselves. Story making has pragmatic implications since it is in conversations that we coordinate actions and collectively create and manage social realities (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). These ideas have been particularly useful in reformulating therapeutic practices and escaping from the deterministic metaphors employed by the early systemic theorists. Soon after pioneers established the field of family therapy, systemic family writers rejected the notions of personality, the person, and individuality as the product of the inner workings of the psyche in interaction with its environment. Personality traits were construed as one element of the interactive process that shaped families. Today, the social constructionist framework has

moved some authors (Combs & Freedman, 1996; Friedman, 1995; Martin, 1994; Rosen & Kuehlwein, 1996) to reaffirm the value of the concept of personhood and the constitution of selves by grouping them in the context of relationships.

In the 1990s, family therapists have been adopting ideas that emphasize how selves are constructed through discourse. This emphasis can be traced back to early efforts, such as those of Sullivan and systemic theorists, at conceptualizing the observed and the observer as components of an interactive process. From a social constructionist perspective, then, the person can encompass many "I," "you," "he," or "she" positions rather than being equated with a unitary stable position, an approach consistent with the focus on context and interaction in the family systems models. To summarize, the incorporation of interpersonal, systemic, and constructionist sensibilities in a study of personality highlights the view that personality is a construct that we continuously negotiate and redefine. Paraphrasing post-modern authors, this perspective has *decentered* the primacy of the individual self and recognized its existence within the context of evolving stories.

REFERENCES

- Ackerman, N. J. (1970). Family psychotherapy and psychoanalysis—Implications of difference. In N. J. Ackerman (Ed.), *Family process* (pp. 5–18). New York: Basic Books.
- Ackerman, N. J. (1981). The functions of the family therapist. In R. J. Green & J. L. Framo (Eds.), *Family therapy: Major contributions* (pp. 317–342). Madison, CT: International Universities Press.
- Auerswald, E. H. (1968). Interdisciplinary versus ecological approach. *Family Process*, 7, 202–215.
- Barone, D. F., Maddux, J. E., & Snyder, C. R. (1997). *Social cognitive psychology: History and current domains*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Bateson, G. (1958). *Naven: A survey of the problems suggested by a composite picture of the culture of a New Guinea tribe drawn from three points of view*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Bateson, G. (1979). *Mind and nature: A necessary unit*. New York, Dutton.
- Bateson, G., Jackson, D. D., Haley, J., & Weakland, J. (1956). Toward a theory of schizophrenia. *Behavioral Science*, 1, 251–264.
- Bateson, G., Jackson, D. D., Haley, J., & Weakland, J. (1976). A note on the double bind (1962). In C. Sluzki, & D. Ramsey (Eds.), *Double bind: The foundation of the communicational approach to the family* (pp. 39–42). New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Bertalanffy, L. von. (1988). *General systems theory*. New York: Braziller.
- Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., & Spark, G. M. (1973). *Invisible loyalties: Reciprocity in intergenerational family therapy*. Hagerstown, MD: Harper & Row.
- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- Broderick, C. G., & Schrader, S. S. (1991). The history of professional marriage and family therapy. In A. S. Gurman & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.), *Handbook of family therapy* (Vol. 2, pp. 3–40). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Buckley, W. (1967). *Sociology and modern systems theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Combs, G., & Freedman, J. (1996). *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York: Norton.
- Cooley, C. H. (1902). *Human nature and the social order*. New York: Scribners.
- Dollard, J., & Miller, N. E. (1950). *Personality and psychotherapy: An analysis in terms of learning, thinking, and culture*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Foerster, H. von. (1981). *Observing systems*. Seaside, CA: Intersystems Publications.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage.
- Framo, J. (1976). Family of origin as a therapeutic resource for adults in marital and family therapy: You can and should go home again. *Family Process*, 15, 193–210.
- Friedman, S. (Ed.). (1955). *The reflecting team in action: Collaborative practice in family therapy*. New York: Guilford Press.

- Fromm, E. (1941). *Escape from freedom*. New York: Avon Books.
- Fromm, E. (1962). *Sigmund Freud's mission: An analysis of his personality and influence*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Fromm, E. (1970). *The crisis of psychoanalysis*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Gergen, K. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist* 40, 266–275.
- Gergen, K. (1994). *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social construction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Glaserfeld, E. von. (1987). *The construction of knowledge: Contributions of conceptual semantics*. Seaside, CA: Intersystems Publications.
- Gottesman, I. I. (1991). *Schizophrenia genesis: The origins of madness*. New York: W. H. Freeman.
- Gurman, A., & Kniskern, D. (Eds.). (1981). *Handbook of family therapy* (Vol. 1). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Gurman, A., & Kniskern, D. (Eds.). (1991). *Handbook of family therapy* (Vol. 2). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Guttman, H. A. (1991). Systems theory, cybernetics, and epistemology. In A. Gurman & D. Kniskern (Eds.), *Handbook of Family Therapy* (Vol. 2, pp. 41–64). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Haley, J. (1976). Development of a theory: A history of a research project. In C. Sluzki & D. Ramsey (Eds.), *Double bind: The foundation of the communicational approach to the family* (pp. 59–104). New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Haley, J. (1980). *Leaving home: The therapy of disturbed young people*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Haley, J. (1987). *Problem solving therapy* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Havens, L. (Ed.). (1983). *Participant observation: The psychotherapy schools in action*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Heylighen, F., & Joslyn, C. (1992, November 1). What are cybernetics and systems science? *Principia Cybernetica Web* [On-line]. <http://pesprhc1.vib.acbe:/webSTRVET.html>.
- Hoffman, L. (1981). *Foundations of family therapy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Horney, K. (1937). *The neurotic personality of our time*. New York: Norton.
- Horney, K. (1939). *New ways in psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton.
- Horney, K. (1950). *Neurosis and human growth*. New York: Norton.
- Imber-Black, E. (1988). *Families and larger systems: A family therapist's guide through the labyrinth*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Jackson, D. D. (Ed.). (1968a). *Communication, family, and marriage* (Vol. 1). Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.
- Jackson, D. D. (Ed.). (1968b). *Communication, family, and marriage* (Vol. 2). Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.
- Jackson, D. D. (1970). The study of the family. In N. J. Ackerman (Ed.), *Family process* (pp. 111–130). New York: Basic Books.
- Jorgenson, J. (1991). Co-constructing the interviewer/co-constructing "family." In F. Steier (Ed.), *Research and reflexivity* (pp. 210–225). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Keeney, B. (1982). *Aesthetic of change*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kelly, G. A. (1955). *The psychology of personal constructs* (Vols. 1–2). New York: Norton.
- Kvarnes, R. G., & Parloff, G. H. (Eds.). (1976). *A Harry Stack Sullivan case seminar: Treatment of a young male schizophrenic*. New York: Norton.
- Lindenmayer, J. P., & Kay, S. R. (Eds.). (1992). *New biological vistas on schizophrenia*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Lyddon, W. J. (1995). Forms and facets of constructivist psychology. In R. Neimeyer & M. J. Mahoney (Eds.), *Constructivism in psychotherapy* (pp. 69–92). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Mahoney, M. J. (1991). *Human change processes: The scientific foundations of psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.
- Martin, J. (1994). *The construction and understanding of psychotherapeutic change: Conversations, memories, and theories*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Maturana, H., & Varela, F. (1984). *El árbol del conocimiento* [The tree of knowledge: The biological roots of human understanding]. Santiago, Chile: Editorial Universitaria.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Minuchin, S., Montalbo, B., Guerney, B., Rosman, B., & Schamer, F. (1967). *Families of the slums*. New York: Basic Books.
- Minuchin, S., Rosman, B., & Baker, L. (1978). *Psychosomatic families: Anorexia nervosa in context*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Mullahy, P. (1953b). A theory of interpersonal relations and the evolution of personality. In H. S. Sullivan (Ed.), *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry* (pp. 239–294). New York: Norton.
- Neill, J. (1982). Biographical introduction to the work of Carl Whitaker. In J. Neill & D. Kniskern (Eds.), *From psyche to system: The evolving therapy of Carl Whitaker* (pp. 1–20). New York: Guilford Press.
- Neill, J., & Kniskern, D. (Eds.). (1982). *From psyche to system: The evolving therapy of Carl Whitaker*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Pearce, B., & Cronen, V. (1980). *Communication, action and meaning: The creation of social realities*. New York: Praeger.
- Perry, H. S. (1972). Introduction to H. S. Sullivan, *Personal psychopathology* (pp. ix–xxiii). New York: Norton.
- Perry, H. S. (1982). *Psychiatrist of America: The life of Harry Stack Sullivan*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Piaget, J., & Inhelder, B. (1971). *Mental imagery in the child*. New York: Basic Books.
- Reiss, D. (1981). *The family construction of reality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rogers, L., & Kegan, R. (1991). Mental growth and mental health as distinct concepts in the study of developmental psychology: Theory, research, and clinical implications. In D. P. Keating & H. Rosen (Eds.), *Constructivist perspectives on developmental psychopathology and atypical development* (pp. 103–147). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Rosen, H. (1996). Meaning-making narratives: Foundations for constructivist and social constructionist psychotherapies. In H. Rosen & K. T. Kuehlwein (Eds.), *Constructing realities: Meaning-making perspectives for psychotherapists* (pp. 3–51). New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Rosen, H., & Kuehlwein, K. T. (Eds.). (1996). *Constructing realities: Meaning-making perspectives for psychotherapists*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Rosenblatt, P. C. (1994). *Metaphors of family systems theory*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Ruesch, J., & Bateson, G. (1951). *Communication: The social matrix of psychiatry*. New York: Norton.
- Sapir, E. (1921). *Language, an introduction to the study of speech*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- Sarbin, T. R. (Ed.). (1986). *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct*. New York: Praeger.
- Schwartzman, J. (Ed.). (1985). *Families and other systems: The macrosystemic context of family therapy*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Segal, L. (1991). Brief therapy: The MRI approach. In A. Gurman & D. Kniskern (Eds.), *Handbook of Family Therapy* (Vol. 2). (pp. 171–199). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Selvini-Palazoli, M., Cecchin, G., Prata, G., & Boscolo, L. (1978). *Paradox and counterparadox*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- Selvini-Palazzoli, M., Cirillo, S., Selvini, M., & Sorrentino, A. M. (1989). *Family games: General models of psychotic processes in the family*. New York: Norton.
- Skinner, B. F. (1957). *Verbal behavior*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Skinner, B. F. (1971). *Beyond freedom and dignity*. New York: Knopf.
- Sluzki, C., & Ramsey, D. (Eds.). (1976). *Double bind: The foundation of the communicational approach to the family*. New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Stanton, M. D., Todd, T. C., & Associates. (1982). *The family therapy of drug abuse and addiction*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1930–1931). Socio-psychiatric research: Its implications for the schizophrenia problem and for mental hygiene. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 87, 977–991.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1931). Environmental factors in etiology and course under treatment of schizophrenia. *Medical Journal and Record*, 133, 19–22.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1948). The meaning of anxiety in psychiatry and life. *Psychiatry*, 48, 1–13.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1950). The illusion of personal individuality. *Psychiatry*, 13, 317–332.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1953a). *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry*. New York: Norton.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1953b). *Conceptions of modern psychiatry*. New York: Norton.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1956). *Clinical studies in psychiatry*. New York: Norton.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1972). *Personal psychopathology*. New York: Norton.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1974). *Schizophrenia as a human process*. New York: Norton.
- Watzlawick, P. (1990). *Munchausen's pigtail or psychotherapy and "reality."* New York: Norton.
- Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J., & Jackson, D. D. (1967). *Pragmatics of human communication*. New York: Norton.
- Weiner, H. (1985). Schizophrenia: Etiology. In H. Kaplan & B. Sadock (Eds.), *Comprehensive textbook on psychiatry* (pp. 650–680). Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins. New York: Norton.
- Whitaker, C. (Ed.). (1958). *Psychotherapy of chronic schizophrenic patients*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Youniss, J. (1980). *Parents and peers in social development*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

