There are several distinct kinds of controls in the personality structure. As discussed in the previous chapters, these controls are employed in the individual’s effort to regulate impulses and the corresponding anxiety associated with such impulses. For example, cognitive controls, including intellectual approaches, are quite different in their operation and consequences from the integrating effects of ego controls, which, in turn, are different in their quality and influence from the effects of control exerted by conscience, which are also different from the effects of individual defense mechanisms that are utilized for control purposes. Defense mechanisms also differ significantly from character traits, in that defense mechanisms largely manage the transitory nature of emotions while character traits as a type of control within the personality persist in a stable and enduring form.

Another control function in the personality structure is the use of fantasy; that is, control over impulses and anxiety becomes possible through the imagined enactment of behavioral sequences. Finally, a special form of control in the personality results from reactions to the emotions of fear or terror. Phobic paralysis and somatization are the forms of control employed to contain and manage fear, terror, or panic. Counterphobic reactions are secondary attempts to control potential paralysis and feelings of terror.

From the psychoanalytic point of view, the function and nature of this amalgam of controls are considered to be derivatives of both ego and superego control functions in the personality. This applies also to the cognitive controls which, as in the individual defense mechanisms, are mobilized under both ego and superego influence in response to impulse. As pointed out in the previous chapter, from the psychoanalytic viewpoint the impulses represent derivative id expressions in the personality. The manner in which controls are available to regulate and manage the impulses then completes the description of essential conflict in the personality.

Because impulse features derive from id sources and control aspects relate to ego and superego features of the personality, one essential area of tension involves id and superego conflict within personality organization. The struggle between id and superego weakens the individual’s resourcefulness and can generate disorganizing anxiety.
In all instances of personality conflict, a central issue to consider is the type of control utilized by any person to oppose, manage, regulate, and integrate that person’s impulses in order to contain anxiety and tension. Each of the various forms of control and the manner in which they operate to manage impulses and to control anxiety are described next.

Control Mechanisms

Cognitive Controls

When intellectual functioning is flexibly responsive to and aligned with the strivings, goals, and interests of the person, cognitive controls are represented. The presence of these controls in the personality is indicated when the responses in the protocol demonstrate evenness of functioning and relative freedom from the interfering effects of anxiety, as well as intactness of attention, concentration, and a well-represented fund of information. Consequently, when cognitive controls are intact, a capacity for abstraction can be assumed and inappropriate tendencies toward concretization are absent.

Controls involving cognitive functions also are reflected when achievement strivings are realistic and generally consistent with the subject’s intellectual capacities and ability to implement goal-oriented behavior. For example, rather than acting out anger or the distress that may accompany it, a good measure of cognitive control exists when the subject relies on goal-directed, focused activity. Furthermore, cognitive control elements of planning, judgment, thinking, and reasoning will be free from idiosyncratic and ruminative fantasies when these controls are intact.

The presence of cognitive controls reflects strength, resourcefulness, and flexibility in the personality. Whenever applicable, these areas of strength should be cited by the psychologist in terms of estimating the resilience in personality functioning. Positive cognitive controls further imply that ego elements and their organization in the personality are correspondingly strong and well integrated.

Ego Controls

In chapter 5, on cognitive functioning, a hierarchical structure of ego functions was proposed. Impairment of the ego was generally associated with impairment of particular dimensions of control, ranging from conditions of poor control corresponding to more primitive ego impairment, to good control reflecting comprehensive ego integration. This hierarchy of ego functions may be conceived as ranging from controls that reflect ego fragmentation to those that indicate the presence of a viable aggregate of ego controls.

In terms of impulse versus control, the functions of the ego, described as integrative and synthetic when operating efficiently, reflect goal orientation, a capacity to tolerate frustration, and the ability to synchronize wishes and action