Additional material relevant to the cognitive organization section of the psychodiagnostic report is presented in this chapter. The ego functions described here pertain to the analysis of cognitive organization involving diagnostic formulations of nonpsychotic character or personality problems, neuroses, and normalcy. Neurosis here is referred to as corresponding to the DSM categories of anxiety, somatoform, dissociative, and other nonpsychotic disorders not classified as personality disorders that are based on sustained difficulty with anxiety and symptoms.

**Integrative Function of the Ego**

The integrative function of the ego regulates anxiety, thinking, perception, and feeling to promote effective pursuit of goals. The integrative function involves the level of cognitive functioning at which—even if impaired—essential ego integrity and the capacity for reality contact are no longer in question. In terms of reality testing and cognitive organization, the assumption of nonpsychosis has been established and reality testing is considered intact. In considering this ego function, it is important to evaluate the regulation of instinctual drives and feelings, the management of anxiety, and the extent to which there is adaptation to realistically perceived, external demands. Impairment of the integrative function of the ego means that the person, although essentially intact and in touch with reality, may nevertheless misapprehend, distort, act-out, and become labile. Such distortions can occur on the basis of less than adequate defensive control over impulses and needs, but not out of the direct breakthrough of primary process primitive urges.

The problems in connection with impairment in the integrative function of the ego occur in personality disorders and neurotic pathology, that is, in those disorders in which the issue of anxiety is a major concern. In personality disorders, undue energy is devoted to the promulgation of rigid character styles as a means to control anxiety. In neuroses, energy is expended in the formation of symptom patterns as a response to the experience of anxiety. In both cases, the extra expenditure of energy diminishes the person’s capacity for goal-directed achievement. Thus, the characterological and neurotic problems reflecting impairment of the
integrative function of the ego include difficulties in regulating anxiety, distortions that interfere with constructive interpersonal relating, reduced efficiency in working toward the achievement of aspirations, and inhibitions in goal direction. A person with impaired integrative ego functioning displays the capacity and interest as well as sufficient reality intactness to master all of these challenges. However, flaws in the cognitive regulation of perception, thinking, and feeling interfere with progress toward mastery and achievement in these areas. Such deficiencies in cognitive regulation occur because energy is deflected away from external goals in the service of regulating internal impulses, conflicts, and anxiety.

An example of insufficiency in the integrative function of the ego can be seen in the case of a bright student who intensely desires academic and career achievement but cannot study unless forced. In such a case, there is impaired regulation of the ability to manage anxiety constructively because instinctual drives, internal conflicts, and inefficient defenses absorb the energies that the student needs for achievement. Impersonal tasks related to external interests and goals are relegated to a secondary position. Accordingly, when this student is forced by authority figures to study, inner resources can be utilized because anxiety about the work is now made threatening in a personal way.

From this example it can be seen that the person’s defenses in regulating anxiety, conflicts, and instinctual drives do not serve long-range interests or even short-term obligations. This example illustrates that the central feature of the integrative function of the ego is its regulatory function—the way in which the individual’s energies and efforts are regulated. Thus, in this illustration, the student reveals an impairment in the regulatory integrative ego function.

In terms of cognitive orientation and practical functioning, the integrative function of the ego affects the adaptive involvements and strategies that are required for effectiveness and success in important areas of life such as relationships, school, and career development. When there is a disturbance at this level, personal conflicts of a neurotic or characterological type reduce the cognitive strengths needed for gratifying, goal-directed functioning. Furthermore, anxiety is experienced in an unregulated manner so that energies and volition cannot be shifted by means of cognitive direction to ensure accomplishments and cope with everyday demands. Internal worry, distress, guilt, and tension, and the symptoms these emotions produce, take the place of constructive and effective application of energies to realistic problem solving. The psychologist must be alert to the specific qualities of pathology associated with impairment of the regulative, integrative cognitive function so that they can be conveyed appropriately in the psychodiagnostic report.

Communicating Findings

The psychologist can convey the nature and effects of impairment in the integrative ego function by discussing the patient’s absorption in and over-focus on personal concerns and inner conflict material. Such conflict undermines efficient involvement in realistic, external goal-directed achievement. Patients with cognitive