Problems Inherent in the Study of Psychotherapy of Psychoses
Conclusions from a Community Psychiatric Action Research Study

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Chapter 10

The methodological problems inherent in the study of psychodynamics and psychotherapy of the psychoses deserve a critical examination because of the influence they have on the results achieved. Our research culture, based, as it is, on the methodologies of natural science, easily devalues observations which rest on a case-specific approach difficult to confirm by experimental methods. Still, much of the most creative and clinically useful work in this field has been based on penetrating observations of individual cases relatively few in number; an excellent example of this being the classic study of seventeen families of schizophrenic patients carried out at the Yale University Department of Psychiatry by Lidz, Fleck, and Cornelison. Such a study, inseparably linked with an extended clinical situation, would not have been possible to execute by making use of simultaneous and matched control material. Employing a natural scientific method, the observational angle would have been more narrow and superficial, of necessity. While saying this, we do not deny the significance of experimental research design (e.g. in verifying the observations based on a case-specific approach).

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Similar constellations occur in studying the results of psychotherapy. Here the restricting influence of an experimental research design is also obvious, not only by making the observational level superficial, but sometimes also distorting it as we are going to indicate later. On the other hand, the dangers of subjectivity's leading to faulty appraisal are actual, particularly when the therapists are themselves also investigating the effects of treatment.

In the following, we attempt to elucidate certain salient problems concerning explicit research objectives and attitudes relative to the psychotherapeutic treatment of psychotic patients, considering them in the framework of the problems we have encountered in our own work and have attempted to solve.

THE TURKU COMMUNITY PSYCIATRIC SCHIZOPHRENIA PROJECT

Background and Objectives

Our research is carried out in Turku, Finland, by a four-person team of two psychiatrists, a psychologist, and a nurse with special training in psychiatric work. The background of our work is based on the experience gained, during a period now exceeding ten years, from the development of a broadly based psychotherapeutic treatment approach in the care of schizophrenic patients at the Turku University Department of Psychiatry, and from the research activities connected with it. This approach combines the psychotherapeutic and social psychiatric views reflected in the individual studies published earlier.²⁻⁸

Our present project started in the spring of 1976. It centers on two objectives.

1. We want to find out what activities and resources should be required in a model of schizophrenia treatment which could be realized in an ordinary community psychiatric setting and which would also be optimal according to our family-centered and psychotherapeutically oriented views of schizophrenia and its treatment.

2. We are also interested in the effects of our treatment model on the prognosis of the patients.

It is important to emphasize that we are not studying the results of psychotherapy compared with other kinds of treatment, but the possible effects achieved by a global psychotherapeutic treatment orientation of schizophrenic patients. Our concept of schizophrenia is multifaceted, emphasizing, however, the interactional origin, and the psychologically comprehensible nature of this disorder.⁶⁻⁸⁻¹⁰