

## PSYCHIATRY

# Family Therapy Analyzed

► EXCESSIVE enthusiasm over the cure-all quality of joint family therapy—the psychological technique that sees and treats the family unit as the patient—was discouraged by some of the most qualified men in the field at the American Orthopsychiatric Association meeting in Washington, D. C.

Dr. Murray Bowen of Georgetown University Hospital, Washington, D. C., carefully distinguished between the consequences of family therapy for parents in the neurotic and the schizophrenic family. Parents in the neurotic family unit can change profoundly, he said. But probably the best to be expected in the schizophrenic unit is that the parents learn better ways of living with their problems.

Family therapy can sometimes have devastating effects on individuals, warned Dr. Theodore Lidz of Yale University, New Haven, Conn. He described the case of a young girl ready to leave the hospital but reluctant to return to her parents because, she said, they did not listen to her or understand her problems.

Parents and daughter were brought together in a family therapy session. The girl spoke to her mother openly and directly, with great emotion. Her mother, brutally demonstrating her daughter's point that she did not understand, commented: "My dress is too tight. I think I should go on a diet." The girl collapsed.

Dr. Lidz also disapproved of family sessions where the parents' sexual relationship was discussed in detail in the presence of young children. He said that such violation of the limits between generations can be risky.

Dr. Lyman Wynne of the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Md., emphasized the need for establishing standards in selecting candidates for family therapy. When the family shares a problem from which it can not extricate itself, the family should be treated as a unit.

Despite the downbeat note of the discussion, all the panelists felt that family therapy had something very valuable to offer. Dr. Bowen said that it "has it all over individual therapy because people can get control of their lives again much faster than by any other means."

• Science News Letter, 83:180 March 23, 1963

## Suicide Threats Serious

► A THREAT to commit suicide should be taken seriously because it can turn into a bona fide attempt, Dr. Leif J. Braaten, psychologist at Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y., warned at a meeting of the American Orthopsychiatry Association in Washington, D. C.

Suicidal tendencies range from idle thoughts about giving up life to actually killing one's self. One type of concern shades into another, Dr. Braaten believes.

For every completed suicide there are

at least 50 more who threaten or carry out attempts to kill themselves, Dr. Braaten reported.

His studies at the Cornell clinic show that the typical suicidal patient is a depressed and angry person who has an extreme need for the support and love of others. The motives for the suicide attempt were to escape the pain and frustration of a sad life; to punish a person the patient believed had wronged him; to cry out for help through the action.

It is important to know how serious the suicide tendency is so that proper treatment can be given, and future attempts prevented. In some cases hospitalization may be necessary. Other times, the person can continue to follow his normal routine while getting help.

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## Spot Underachievers

► UNDERACHIEVERS, the students who do not live up to their potential, can be spotted at the age of five, Dr. Theodore B. Cohen of Temple Medical Center, Philadelphia, told the American Orthopsychiatric Association in Washington, D. C.

A kindergarten teacher, a psychologist and a child psychiatrist were all able to tell which of 56 kindergarten children would live up to their potential in the first grade and which would have trouble.

The underachievers were excessively worried and nervous children, Dr. Cohen reported. They tended to be depressed and to use muddy colors in their paintings.

The researchers hope their work will help in the early discovery and prevention of problems in school learning.

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## Do You Know?

The use of *polymers*, materials from which plastics are made, has increased 1,000 times what it was 30 years ago.

An experimental, low-cost electronic *memory unit* is smaller than a pack of book matches and is capable of processing 100,000 computer words per second.

Pigs are being used to simulate people in a study of the relationship of cholesterol and fatty proteins which have connection with *atherosclerosis*.

Radar investigations with *Venus* indicate that the cloud-covered planet may be rotating in the opposite direction from that of earth.

It takes two pounds of *feed* to develop one pound of chicken broiler meat, three pounds for a pound of pork and six to eight pounds for a pound of beef.

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## Questions

**BIOCHEMISTRY**—What new chemical has been found for relief from fever and inflammation? p. 178.

**GENERAL SCIENCE**—What causes duckweeds to rise from the depths of ponds in the spring? p. 183.

**GEOPHYSICS**—What produced the surface features of the moon? p. 182.

**MEDICINE**—What effect does botulism have on the central nervous system? p. 185.

**PHYSICS**—What new particles have been found with the Bevatron? p. 181.

**PSYCHIATRY**—What are the causes of depression in mothers of severely burned children? p. 179.

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