

PSYCHIC OVEREXCITABILITY AND PSYCHONEUROSIS

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The notion of psychoneurosis is not clearly defined in the psychological and psychiatric literature.

In our view psychoneuroses are structures, syndromes and processes of disharmony and conflicts within the inner psychic milieu and with the external environment. They tend to develop against the background of such hereditary traits as: increased psychic sensitivity with respect to both external and internal stimuli, manifesting itself in various forms of overexcitability in different areas; nuclei of inner psychic milieu and empathy; and nuclei of special interests, capacities and talents. At the same time these nuclei form a basis for an accelerated development toward secondary integration (achievement of a full measure of personality).

Psychoneuroses are, in our view, in the majority of cases, positive developmental processes, i.e. processes of positive disintegration.

In other words, disintegration is always positive when it means the acceleration of specifically human development. Inner disharmony means being in positive conflicts with oneself and with one's external milieu. What we are thus describing is psychoneurosis but positive because it promotes individual growth.

The character of psychoneurosis depends on typological traits (on different forms of overexcitability) of a given individual and on his actual developmental level. This means that there will be different forms of psychoneurosis experienced for example, by a sensual type on a low level of his development and different on a high level of his development. There will also be different psychoneurotic processes in an individual with predominantly intellectual overexcitability and different ones in an individual with predominantly emotional overexcitability.

Generally speaking, there exists a correlation between particular psychoneurosis and particular forms of psychic overexcitability, and

between a particular form of psychoneurosis and a given level of development. We consider psychic overexcitability - independently of its levels - as rudimentary differentiated stage of psychoneurosis. Overexcitability can transform itself into psychoneurosis of medium or high level, or it can lead to a process with small possibility for development, and, even to negative disintegration, such as psychosis or other forms of involution. Whichever direction it takes depend primarily on the developmental potential of a given individual. Psychic overexcitability, if it is of pure form, such as appears on the lower level of development, can be transformed into a simple form of psychoneurosis lacking in complexity and richness. Psychic overexcitability of the mixed type yields a mixed form of psychoneurosis. A mixed form of psychoneurosis represents predominantly an expression of dynamisms of high level.

Such correlations are the subjects of the present chapter.

### 1. Psychoneuroses characteristic for sensual overexcitability

A sensual person on a level between primitive integration and unilevel disintegration may develop a hysterical characteropathy, or better a hysterical psychopathy with the following forms of behavior: primitive actorship, pathological lying, excessive sexual excitability, impulsive behavior and almost no inhibitions. This is not, however, psychopathic behavior in the strict sense of the word, because its egoism is not premeditated and systematic, there is no excessive concentration on selfish goals, and though the drives are strong, they direct the individual's behavior in a changeable manner depending on his mood.

Conversion psychoneurosis (conversion hysteria) represents a somewhat higher level of development. It has the following characteristic forms of behavior: capriciousness, difficulties in understanding oneself and others, tendencies towards acting up, cutaneous overexcitability and

related to it excessive needs of caress yet combined with frequent sexual frigidity, sexual enthusiasm such as falling in love "from the first sight" and frequent falling out of love after not very deep negative and objective experiences that appear to justify the change of mind. Conversion hysteria appears frequently in the form of sexual neurosis leading often to a split between partners.

On the level of hierarchization (i.e. multilevel disintegration) we observe worrying and being overly concerned with one's situation but also with the life situations of others. Exclusivity of emotions is strongly accentuated and it is strongly psychologized but with still excessive saturation with sensual and sexual contents. There appear disappointments, depressions and sadness, in friendship and love as a result of unchanged sensuality and impulsiveness. Dramatization of one's own experiences is strong and of fairly good quality. Psychoneurosis on this level abounds in intense inner conflicts as a result of spontaneous hierarchization of experienced values and still weak rational thinking and reflection. Conflicting sensual and emotional tendencies frequently cause "splitting" in sexual attitudes. Sometimes instead of a conversion of psychic into physical phenomena we observe the opposite-reaction to physical difficulties resulting in an increased complexity of psychic reactions.

On a still higher level (i.e. organized multilevel disintegration) a hysteria-like psychoneurosis acquires more and more mixed characteristics as a result of progressive combination with other forms of psychic overexcitability (which means that higher levels of development are accessible only on the basis of a combination of several type of psychic overexcitability.)

We observe an increased susceptibility to higher and higher psychic stimuli, a sensual overexcitability of a higher type, and usually also an affective overexcitability. We observe a growing hierarchical differentiation and greater capacity for enthusiasm on a higher level. Psychoneurotic

conversion may involve here attempts to subjugate - through meditation and contemplation - the physical to the psychic (immobilization, wherein the physiological symptoms resemble sleep while consciousness is fully active). Dramatization is on this level an expression of involvement with realities of a higher level, with their more complex problems and often is combined with depression and states of anxiety.

On an even higher level we encounter existential experiences, states of strong ascetic self-denial, capacity for self-sacrifice, striving for the absolute and for full identification with the ideal.

There are no psychoneuroses on the highest level, i.e. secondary integration.

In summary, we can say that the psychoneurosis characteristically correlated with sensual overexcitability is hysteria in its different forms: psychopathic, hysteria, conversion psychoneurosis, hysteria-like psychoneurosis and existential psychoneurosis with a highly developed hierarchical structure. These different levels of hysteria correspond to different levels of sensual overexcitability.

## 2. Psychoneuroses characteristic for psychomotor overexcitability

On the level of primitive integration psychomotor overexcitability is displayed by continuous excess of movements (compulsive need for games and physical exercise, wanderlust, and at the same time incapacity for concentration and reflection, and no felt need for either), temperamental and psychophysiological egocentrism (subjugation of others) and different forms of maladjustment (readiness to pick up fights, and to become aggressive).

In unilevel disintegration there is already some inhibition and some psychologization. In consequence we observe nervous ticks, hyperkinesis and periodical explosions of psychomotricity, which can take the

form of increased excitability narrowed down to one area as for instance chain smoking, going to movies daily, going to races, excessive sexual activity, excessive drinking, use of drugs, or psychomotoric perseverations (counting telephone poles while riding on the train, or continuous looking at the watch).

On a higher level (spontaneous multilevel disintegration) psychomotor overexcitability is related more and more to other types of overexcitability such as emotional, imaginal or intellectual. In consequence there is more inhibition and higher tension of multilevel conflicts. These inhibitions and tensions may precipitate states of deep depression, night anxieties (in children and in adults), suicidal tendencies, and may also result in a susceptibility to vascular contractions as in heart or vascular neurosis.

With the progress of reflection, growing inhibitions and inner tensions increase dissatisfaction with oneself. This may lead to affect-motoric combinations as in a combination of obsessions with compulsions or of feelings of guilt with suicidal tendencies. If an individual in whom such combination occurs also has some imaginal components then creative crises may occur. These crises may lead either to far reaching inner transformations, or to strong aggression toward oneself, in the extreme case such as suicide.

On a still higher level (organized multilevel disintegration) inner tensions decrease. Strong dynamics and need of being active are subordinated to the realization of higher levels of the inner psychic milieu and to social work. Depressions and anxiety states may coexist and may even cause states of crisis, but their subject is the disturbing presence of lower dynamisms of the inner psychic milieu. These dynamisms are then weakened while the higher dynamisms are strengthened. On this level of development depressions and states of anxiety are the substance of a sublimated existential psychoneurosis.

There are no psychoneurotic symptoms on the level of secondary integration.

To sum up: different types of psychoneurosis correspond to different levels of psychomotor overexcitability beginning with a mixed psychoneurotic with a prevalence of compulsions (unilevel disintegration) through depressive-anxiety psychoneurosis with somatic symptoms and obsessive-compulsive psychoneurosis with suicidal tendencies (spontaneous multilevel disintegration) to existential psychoneurosis.

### 3. Psychoneuroses characteristic for emotional overexcitability

The lowest level of psychoneurosis is represented here by hypochondria and neurasthenia. Their characteristic features are ambivalences, ambitendencies, egocentric despondency and fear. Emotional tensions are usually restricted to a narrow area and as a rule have a temperamental and psychosomatic character.

The higher the level of psychoneurotic functions the broader and deeper is the range of emotional experiences. And conversely, the broader and deeper are the emotions the higher is the level of psychoneurotic functions.

Psychasthenia is characteristic for spontaneous multilevel disintegration.

The reality function is here weak on a low level but strong on a high level. It is an expression of escape from narrow daily reality to satisfy the need of living and being creative on a different but higher and richer level. One poet expressed it in the following way: "I do not live and I do not want to live, but I will say more, I would live a life of beauty, and I spit on an existence good for pigs!"

There are also positive obsessive tendencies and a need for creative systematization. Positive obsessive tendencies are, for instance, a great love which disregards all conventions and restrictions of reality, an enduring emotional involvement with a need for inner life and resignation from personal career, an embracing of the ideal to counteract all injustice, a "divine" path of Don Quixote. Creative systematization means here the most penetrating attempts to enter into the reality of a higher level, to investigate it thoroughly and to introduce its dominant principles into life. Such for instance is the introduction of an absolute and unconditional dominant of altruism to all situations of human conflict (Saint-Exupéry), or through the expansion of the heroic principle "where the sheep perish so must the shepherd".

There are states of anxiety and depression of high tension and of dramatic character, often also a "struggle with oneself" (multilevel conflicts).

On this level we encounter also psychoneurosis of failure which is as a rule handled in a creative way. Psychoneurosis of failure is thus evaluated by the individual as a process positive in his development whereby the psychoneurotic disturbances are accepted as creative dynamisms of suffering and transformation.

On the highest level of psychoneurosis (organized multilevel disintegration) we observe psychasthenia with an orientation toward existential philosophy, with transcendental creative ideas, with a developed creative systematization, with empathy, with control of oneself and with the awareness of taking advantage of psychoneurotic dynamisms in order to build one's own personality and that of others.

#### 4. Psychoneuroses characteristic for imaginal overexcitability

On the borderline between primary integration (psychopathy) and unilevel disintegration we observe perversion and strong masturbation in case of restriction of imagination to sexual matters and with high responsivity to visual stimuli. For instance necrophilic tendencies, experienced in imagination or in actuality, lower forms of fetishism or primitive homosexuality. In unilevel disintegration we encounter frequently combination of anxiety and obsession psychoneurosis of the imaginal type. This involves strong experience of fear or obsession by imagining concrete terrifying events or figures which recur repeatedly. Sometimes schizophrenia like symptoms with strong components of anxiety and imagination such as hallucinations. Besides frequent and intense dreams also daydreaming and fantasies are of frequent occurrence. An intensified need for fantasy leads often to the use of drugs and to pathological lying.

In spontaneous multilevel disintegration we observe "pathological" symptoms of a split between that which is and that which ought to be, and also with conflicts between higher and lower reality. It is an "illness" whose nature is a need to dwell in the world of imagination and fantasy, to disregard adjustment to everyday reality. Hence strong egocentrism even autism, yet with strong sensitivity and empathy toward others. We encounter also escapes into the "inner world" and frequently a tendency to suicide, and even actual suicide.

In organized multilevel disintegration occurs something like a shrinkage of actual reality with simultaneous systematic development of dreams and creative fantasies. As a result there appear in creative individuals psychasthenic obsessions. For instance Kafka systematized his dreams and his creative fantasies, or Proust developed his well-organized world of fantasy.

In summary, we have the following scale of symptoms and psychoneurotic syndromes corresponding to imaginal overexcitability: perversions of imagination and masturbation, imaginal fears and obsessions with schizophrenia like symptoms and drug addiction, psychasthenic split between actual reality and the reality of different levels of fantasy.

##### 5. Psychoneuroses characteristic for intellectual overexcitability

Intellectual disquietude caused by a realization that one's intelligence is serving primitive drives is a partially psychoneurotic symptom at its lowest level.

The higher level is represented by ambivalencies arising from an excess of analytical ruminations and lack of synthetic approaches.

In spontaneous multilevel disintegration we may find "morbid" intellectual struggle of philosophical-existential character with a particular concern for a scale of values. Such intellectual activities play a considerable part in the formation of such dynamisms as astonishment with oneself, disquietude with oneself, dissatisfaction with oneself, and feelings of shame and **guilt**.

In organized multilevel disintegration, we encounter psychasthenic disturbances, anxieties and depressions with "condensed" constellations of problems, with tendencies toward creative systematization, with existential and alterocentric components. Nevertheless we do not observe any tendencies to experience or act in a manner that would be spastic, impulsive, a reflex. The "disturbances" cease to be such and in turn contribute to a systematic and multilevel transformation of emotions and drives and bring them into harmonious cooperation with intellectual activities.

We do not observe any psychoneurotic processes on the level of secondary integration.

In conclusion we can state that psychic overexcitability, in its different forms and levels, is the key to intra- and inter-psychoneurotic differentiation. This differentiation is of basic importance for psychotherapy and help in self growth.