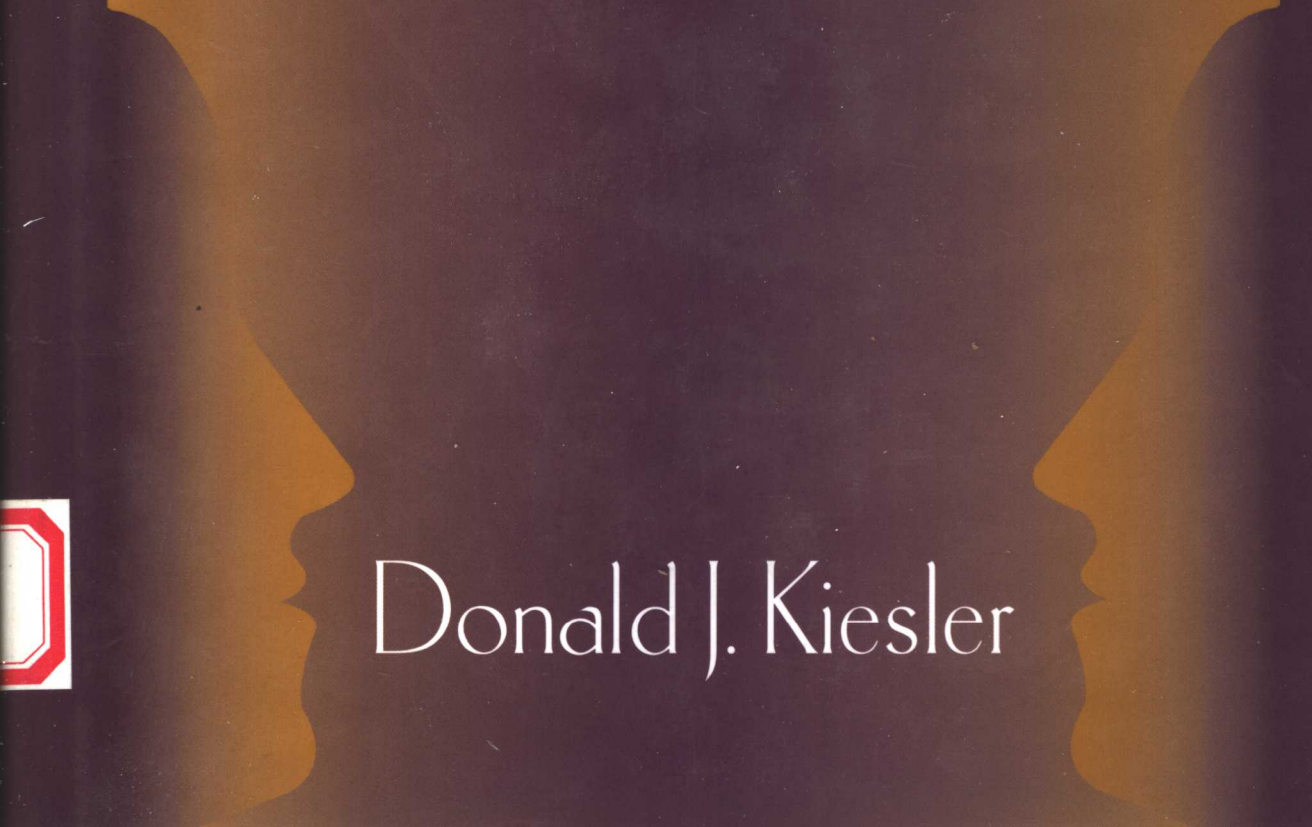
Contemporary Interpersonal Theory & Research

Personality, Psychopathology, and Psychotherapy



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Series Preface

This series of books is intended to provide scientists and practitioners in the mental health disciplines with up-to-date summaries and critiques of clinical theory, diagnosis, assessment, intervention, and prevention. The major common thread binding the series is its focus on the scientific basis underlying effective clinical work.

It is extremely difficult for scientific investigators to keep up with the burgeoning empirical work, even with regard to specific disorders; it is impossible for the practicing clinician, especially those who treat a range of disorders, to do so. Each book in this series attempts to distill the most pertinent information covered by that book's topic, and presents it in a scientifically valid and practitioner-friendly manner. Great strides have been made in recent years in all aspects of clinical practice and especially in developing valid diagnostic criteria, scientifically acceptable assessment processes, and effective disorder-specific treatments; less progress has been made with prevention efforts, but exciting large-scale longitudinal studies are underway. Our biggest problem is getting the current scientific information available in a utilizable form; that is the major purpose of this series.

W. Edward Craighead

University of Colorado
Boulder, Colorado

Preface

Our transactions with each other
Express automatic and stubborn reactions.
If the pattern remains intractable,
Our shared destiny is ensured.
If, however, we can shatter the cycle,
The opportunity becomes ours
To co-create our "in-between" world.

More than we humans ever care to admit, we are responsible for the world that we experience. My genes and my childhood establish the basic pattern of the person I think I am. This core pattern acts as a who-I-am template filtering what I remember, what I see and hear, what I think, what I feel, what I anticipate. In the here and now, my template highlights the part of the world that I choose to experience, the part that I notice and tune in, the world to which I respond. The human condition is such that my response to "my world" is determined as much by my who-I-am template as by the ongoing events "really" happening. To a disturbing degree, I actively create my world—the events that occur, my reactions to them, and the chains of actions and reactions that follow.

The most important objects in my world are other humans—persons who coinitiate the events to which we take turns reacting. Right now you are a person of whom I am acutely aware. We—I and my template of you, "the reader"—are in a real sense cowriting this book.

As social animals, we humans require transactions with others to satisfy our needs, attain our goals, and fulfill our potentialities. Seldom in our lives do we encounter a no-person world, rarely do we experience solitary, impersonal moments. Alone on mountaintops, our minds still project continuous streams of "people" pictures, memories, thoughts, and dialogues—internal transactions with others. In the most solitary moments of sleep, our brains continue to conjure up exciting and seductive interpersonal scenes and transactions. Ordinarily, we remain mostly unaware of these transactions, but whenever we look inward, we can spot human shadows in every nook and cranny.

Who we really are can be discovered best in the patterns of our public and private transactions with people. Apart from people, we do not exist—do not think, do not feel, do not desire, do not remember. Yet, at least in our Western world, we prefer to ignore the basic social embeddedness of our being; we opt to believe that we are self-made, self-contained, and self-sufficient individuals who pick and choose the extent to which we include others in the pursuit of our lives. In line with this myth of individuality, our thoughts draw firm boundaries between "self" and "other." We aspire to be

autonomous crafters of our own destinies. We protect who-we-are (our basic personalities) inside a deeply private world of experience that we consider mostly inaccessible to others.

The part-truth of the Western myth is that we do indeed meet the world with our who-I-am templates and create our own worlds. By definition, our templates distort our experience of events in the world. Experiences filtered by our templates cannot be directly perceived nor totally understood by anyone else. The existential part-truth, then, is that we are alone and isolated beings who interact with fantasized others whose outlines we shape trhough our who-I-am templates.

The false part of the Western myth is that our who-I-am templates took form gradually, resulting from interactions of our genetic dispositions with the "significant other" persons who traveled with us over the terrain of our childhood and present adult lives. Reflected appraisals from my significant persons progressively defined what was "good," "bad," and "not" me—my who-I-am template with which I now create my world. A major paradox is that my present Western perception of self-agency and self-creation was built on the foundation of my mostly passive incorporation, when an infant and child, of what my particular significant others happened to value, devalue, and abhor in me.

Although another individual cannot validly understand my internal experience, neither can I. What is possible for us both are formulations guided by successive approximations. Although my templates distort my experience of world events with others, others' templates also simultaneously distort their experience of me. What transpires between us is a moment-by-moment interactive process in which our respective templates attempt to shape and alter each other's reactions in self-confirming directions.

Since transactional outcomes are conjointly determined, I participate with others in creating our respective worlds. I need to assume responsibility for the extent of my automatic and rigid participation in these negotiations. The more I cling to a rigid, boldly etched who-I-am template that distorts others' intents or acts and bully others into reacting as my template dictates, the more I sabotage any possibility of experiencing surprising, mutually fulfilling, and dyadically unique outcomes.

Our entire lives are embedded in interpersonal relationships. Originally, they constructed our transactional templates. In the here and now, these encounters both maintain and revise our who-I-am templates depending on our ability to transcend automatic and rigid self-presentation. In a real sense, we are isolated and autonomous beings insulated by our templates. In an equally real sense, however, the exclusive business of our templates involves others, and human fulfillment requires moments with others during which we conjointly create unexpected and reciprocally pleasurable shared outcomes.

One of the latter dyadic moments often occurs within the institutionalized human encounter we call psychotherapy. A major section of this book summarizes a therapeutic process that I will call "contemporary interpersonal psychotherapy."

An essential outcome pursued within the interpersonal psychotherapeutic encounter is an experience during which clients authentically confront, with the help of another person, the self-defeating interpersonal consequences that constitute their thematic maladjustments or problems. With therapist support, clients come to appreciate that they actively create their worlds—their interpretations of events that happen, their reactions, and the chains of actions-reactions that follow. They learn that "who-I-am" is discovered best within the repetitive patterns of public and private transactions with people. During the therapy session, clients experience live the human process in which their vulnerable

and rigid who-I-am template attempts to shape and change the therapist's reactions in self-confirming directions. Through recurrent therapist metacommunicative feedback during the session, they learn that the part of the interpersonal process for which they need to assume responsibility is the manner and extent to which they participate rigidly in negotiations with the therapist and others. Finally, with innovative efforts to reduce the rigid input and to find alternative interpersonal negotiations, clients learn to stop bullying others into reactions that their own templates unilaterally dictate. Ultimately, they may be lucky enough to enjoy moments with others in which they conjointly create unexpected and reciprocally joyful outcomes.

The primary goal of this book is to provide an exhaustive coverage of contemporary interpersonal theory and research into personality, psychopathology, and psychotherapy. My usage of the term contemporary interpersonal theory is distinctive and refers to the theoretical and research tradition beginning with Sullivan (1953a, 1953b), through Leary (1957) and Carson (1969), down to present-day researchers and theoreticians. Major interpersonal works by these key authors are listed on page xiii.

There are three essential theoretical and methodological components of this tradition: (a) the core theoretical and clinical writings of Sullivan; (b) the *interpersonal circle,* beginning with the Kaiser Permanente group's original offering (Leary, 1957) down to and including subsequent interpersonal circle revisions and amplifications; and (c) the *interpersonal transaction cycle,* which originally was presented by Carson (1969) as the "unbroken causal loop" and subsequently was amplified by Safran (1984a) as the "cognitive interpersonal cycle" and by Kiesler (1986a, 1988) as the "maladaptive transaction cycle." Although various other contemporary interpersonalists offer their own particular amplifications of these basic ingredients, the interpersonal circle and the interpersonal transaction cycle remain as defining conceptual-empirical models that differentiate contemporary interpersonal applications to personality, psychopathology, and psychotherapy.

A second goal of this book is to provide comprehensive coverage of contemporary interpersonal theory and research while simultaneously weaving in, as unifying threads, my own interpersonal communication formulations. The distinctiveness of my interpersonal communication theory and research derives from its integration of three conceptual traditions: Sullivan's interpersonal therapy and its contemporary interpersonal theory derivatives, interactional psychiatry, and research in nonverbal communication. The most recent prior summary of my interpersonal communication approach can be found in Kiesler (1988).

My overarching hope is that, despite inevitable bias from my own formulations and emphases, you will encounter within the covers of this book competent, fair, and comprehensive coverage of this contemporary interpersonal theory and research. As a scientist-professional clinical psychologist, I hope also that the excitement of your discovery will stimulate further pursuit of your own clinical, scholarly, and scientific interests.

Throughout 12 chapters, I attempt to provide a comprehensive summary of available contemporary interpersonal theory and research. The book contains two major parts. Part One surveys contemporary interpersonal notions of personality and maladjustment. Chapter 1 defines interpersonal behavior in detail and summarizes circumplex inventories that have been developed to measure individual differences in interpersonal behavior. Chapter 2 discusses potential moderating variables for interpersonal behavior (e.g., gender, situations, and time) and reviews critiques of two-dimensional interpersonal

theory. Chapter 3 analyzes the covert components of interpersonal behavior including the concepts of selective attention and perception, self and self-other schemas, emotion, and significant others. Chapter 4 reviews in detail the central notions of self-fulfilling prophecy and interpersonal complementarity, defines complementarity as it is measured on the interpersonal circle, and highlights important issues underpinning the considerable empirical literature on complementarity. Chapter 5 defines my central interpersonal communication notion of "impact message" and describes in detail the rationale and development of the Impact Message Inventory as it is used in personality, psychopathology, and psychotherapy. Chapter 6 reviews general interpersonal principles of maladjusted behavior, then concentrates on definitions and applications of the Maladaptive Transaction Cycle to conceptualize Axis I and Axis II *DSM* disorders.

Part Two concentrates on applications of contemporary interpersonal theory to assessment-diagnosis of psychopathology and to psychotherapy and supervisory approaches. Chapter 7 outlines in detail interpersonal principles of diagnosis as well as applications of the Maladaptive Transaction Cycle and assessment of interpersonal problems to diagnosis of *DSM* disorders. Chapter 8 sidetracks briefly to discuss the place of nonverbal communication in interpersonal behavior and to define and illustrate the unique "meaning frames" vocabulary used in subsequent chapters. Chapter 9 analyzes various notions of psychotherapy relationship from contemporary interpersonal perspectives, including the concepts of resistance or countercontrol, transference or parataxic distortion, and countertransference. It then highlights a discussion of relationship as an essential context for effectiveness of psychotherapy interventions. Chapter 10 focuses on how the interpersonal therapist, throughout therapy, targets various components of the patient's Maladaptive Transaction Cycle, and how the interpersonal circle and principles of complementarity are used to plan essential therapeutic goals and interventions. It also summarizes available interpersonal stage models of psychotherapy, differential interpersonal treatments, and analyzes the issues of patient-therapist matching, predicting responsiveness to psychotherapy, and measuring client improvement in psychotherapy. Chapter 11 concentrates exclusively on the central process of "therapeutic metacommunication," first defining this process in detail, then presenting a two-stage model and a series of principles to guide the therapist's applications of metacommunication throughout the therapy course. Finally, Chapter 12 presents an interpersonal communication analysis of psychotherapy supervision that defines "parallel process" as a central supervisory event. It offers a series of supervisory interventions and emphasizes the metacommunicative priority in dealing both with therapeutic and supervisory impasses.

The reader needs to be forewarned that I will be using circles, transaction cycles, circumplex interpersonal inventories, and the like in attempting to explain essential aspects of ongoing interpersonal transactions, especially those occurring within psychotherapy. These models and measures often specify alternative actions that a therapist might initiate to facilitate some shift in a client's transactional themes. The therapist who becomes overly enamored of these moves and countermoves easily can lose touch with the authentic experience of the client (and of him- or herself) during their momentary encounters within the session; the therapist tends to get sidetracked into manipulating the client through preplanned, overprogrammed, and for the most part disrespectful and ineffective behavioral maneuvers.

A therapist can stay out of this undesirable cul-de-sac only by constant self-monitoring of ongoing cognitions and reactions, or by helpful monitoring from other

supervisory eyes and ears. When applying any conceptualization of psychotherapy, a therapist's understandings and speculations regarding the client need to be confined to between-session periods. On entering the room with a client, the therapist needs to cast conceptualizations into the ground of his or her experience so that the client-of-the-moment can emerge in clear figure and, as much as possible, can be perceived and experienced fresh and anew.

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Virginia Commonwealth University
April 1996

KEY VOLUMES IN CONTEMPORARY INTERPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Anchin, J. C., & Kiesler, D. J. (1982). *Handbook of interpersonal psychotherapy.* Elmsford, NY: Pergamon.

Andrews, J. D. W. (1991). *The active self in psychotherapy: An integration of therapeutic styles.* New York: Gardner.

Benjamin, L. S. (1993). *Diagnosis and treatment of personality disorders: A structural approach.* New York: Guilford.

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Leary, T. (1957). *Interpersonal diagnosis of personality.* New York: Ronald.

Oden, T. C. (1976). *TAG: Transactional awareness game.* New York: Harper & Row.

Plutchik, R., & Conte, H. R. (Eds.). (in press). *Circumplex models of personality and emotion.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Safran, J. D., & Segal, Z. V. (1990). *Interpersonal process in cognitive therapy.* New York: Basic Books.

Sullivan, H. S. (1953a). *Conceptions of modern psychiatry.* New York: Norton.

Sullivan, H. S. (1953b). *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry.* New York: Norton.

Wiggins, J. S. (Ed.). (in press). *The five-factor model of personality: Theoretical perspectives.* New York: Guilford.

Contents

PART ONE

Personality and Psychopathology

CHAPTER 1

Overt Interpersonal Behavior and the Interpersonal Circle

Interpersonal behavior refers to recurrent patterns of reciprocal relationship present among two persons' covert and overt actions and reactions studied over the sequence of their transactions with each other.

Contemporary interpersonal personality and psychotherapy relies heavily on the seminal contributions of Harry Stack Sullivan (1953a, 1953b). As an antidote to the individualistic theoretical emphasis of his time, Sullivan insisted that human behavior can be understood only in relation to its historical and current interpersonal contexts. It follows that, within the psychotherapy arena, what needs to be studied and understood is the pattern of transactions between the client and other persons (including the therapist)—not the behavior of the client in conceptual isolation.

An interpersonal approach endorses circular (rather than linear) causality (Danziger, 1976). A person or client's behavior is not viewed as being driven solely either by situational factors or by intrapsychic motivations. Rather, the client's relationships (including that with the therapist) are framed as two-person groups in which members exert mutual influence (bidirectional causality).

Contemporary interpersonal theory was inaugurated with a series of publications emanating from the Kaiser Permanente research project (M. B. Freedman, 1985; M. B. Freedman, Leary, Ossorio, & Coffey, 1951; LaForge, 1977, 1985; LaForge, Freedman, & Wiggins, 1985; LaForge, Leary, Naboisek, Coffey, & Freedman, 1954; LaForge & Suczek, 1955; Leary, 1955, 1957; Leary & Coffey, 1954, 1955; Leary & Harvey, 1956; Leary, Lane, Apfelbaum, Croppa, & Kaufmann, 1956; Strack, 1996; Wiggins, 1985b). A significant scientific contribution, the Kaiser interpersonal circumplex made possible, for the first time, empirical tests of key propositions embedded within Sullivan's interpersonal theory. As Leary and Coffey (1955) noted, their group assumed the task of "developing a methodology of investigation which is consistent with Sullivan's theory and gives it some operational meaning" (p. 111).

Subsequent major contributions to the literature of the contemporary interpersonal tradition include those by Carson (1969), Anchin and Kiesler (1982), Kiesler (1988), Safran and Segal (1990), Andrews (1991), Benjamin (1993), Plutchik and Conte (in

press), and Wiggins (in press). Recounts of the development of contemporary interpersonal theory and an articulation of its major assumptions can be found in these works.

SOME BASIC ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Leary (1957) felt that "to understand a human being is to have probability evidence about his relationships with others (perceived, actual, or symbolic), about the durable interpersonal techniques by which he wards off anxiety, and about the reciprocal responses these techniques pull from others" (pp. 55–56).

Leary (1957, pp. 59–60) offered nine working principles for an interpersonal theory of personality:

1. All interpersonal behaviors are attempts by a person to avoid anxiety or to establish and maintain self-esteem.
2. Any personality measure should be able to assess, on the same continuum, the whole range of behavior from normal, adjustive to abnormal, extreme.
3. Assessment of interpersonal behavior requires a broad collection of specific behavioral measures that are systematically related to each other.
4. For valid assessment of interpersonal behavior, the same measures (at the corresponding levels) used to characterize the behavior of Person A need to be applied equivalently to the interactant, Person B.
5. To be precise, any statement about personality must indicate the level of personality to which it refers.
6. The theoretical levels of personality must be specifically listed, defined, and measured.
7. The same system of variables should be used to measure interpersonal behavior at each level of personality.
8. Measurements of interpersonal behaviors must be public and verifiable operations, which permit conclusions presented, not as absolute facts, but as probability statements.
9. A system of personality should be able to measure behavior in a specific functional context (which for Leary and his Kaiser colleagues was the interpersonal behavior to be expected in the psychiatric clinic).

In the *Handbook of Interpersonal Psychotherapy* (Kiesler, 1982b), I document six additional central interpersonal assumptions regarding human personality:

1. *Human Transactions.* Interpersonal study focuses on human transactions, not on the behavior of individuals. Activity is to be understood and explained as interpersonal, which necessitates focus on at least a dyad or two-person group.

2. *Construct of Self.* A central theoretical position is accorded to a construct of self that is interpersonal and transactional in its development and functioning throughout life. A central and pervasive feature of our transactions is self-presentation—the automatic, predominantly unaware, and recurrent manner in which we centrally view ourselves, which in turn leads to acted-out claims on others (evoking messages) regarding the kind of reactions and relationships we seek from them.