

Focus on

The Modifiers: Reason, Will and Emotion

Frequently, my perception of character structure as expressed by the body seems to conflict with the individual's unique mode of expression. This has misled me several times during diagnosis and I now believe that, while character structure ultimately defines the individual's basic issues and defense system, there are other factors which I call modifiers. These modifiers are really modes of expression and they significantly influence how basic characterological attitudes are manifested. They are chosen by the individual (sometimes in earliest infancy, sometimes later on) and this choice results in a new modality of expression— or behavior—that, coupled with character structure, becomes the individual's unique manner of expression. Thus, the modifiers become both cause and effect. They alter the character structure and are, in turn, expressed through the character structure, thus being altered by it.

I believe these modifiers are also nuclei around which the ego develops in the course of its differentiation. The infant possesses them all at birth in latent form and, during the developmental stages, orients himself selectively toward one or more. This choice is partially the result of his interaction with his environment/ parents/society. The choice is adaptive at the time it is made. But, like character structure, it frequently becomes maladaptive in

cause it becomes exaggerated or distorted, partially because the choice of one or two usually limits the function of the third one.

The belief that the infant can make choices as to his means of expression may shock many people. But character structure alone clearly does not identify the individual's defenses sufficiently. For instance, there is the affect-blocked schizoid defense and the emotional schizoid defense. One is frozen, cold, non-communicative and presents very little material to the therapist, while the other is overwhelmed constantly with feelings, is explosive, sometimes to such an extent that so much material is exposed that it cannot be analyzed, interpreted or integrated. Yet both are schizoid structures. The use of the modifier concept permits us to differentiate between the emotive and the rational schizoid defense structures.

There are, I believe, three basic modifiers whose identification and recognition can facilitate our understanding of the dynamics of our clients. If the character structures are considered "types," the interaction of the modifiers creates "subtypes." These modifiers are reason—resulting in a rational subtype; emotion— resulting in an emotive subtype; and will—resulting in a willful subtype. The baseline characteristics of each are as follows:

Rational Subtype Denies feelings, intuition; attempts to understand everything logically. Non Sequitur is unacceptable; therefore, all intuition is looked down upon. Primary drives, sexuality and aggression and their expression are repressed as much as possible. The need to understand logically leads to distortion and eventually sophistry. At the same time there is idealization of the laws of syllogisms (logical, progressive, relentless premises that reach an unalterable conclusion). While the reality principle is valued above all else, it is frequently marred and distorted due to denial of intuition, feeling and basic drives. The striving for reality through intellectual understanding must be understood as an effort to compensate for lack of true reality contact. Basic statements are: "I think, therefore, I am," and "What I understand is real."

Emotional Subtype Emotions frequently override reason. Feelings are released in explosive fashion and can be very strong. The reality principle is subjugated to subjective perception and feelings. Rapid release and gratification of primary drives, sexuality and aggression are considered indispensable. Their containment or postponement is felt as painful. There are huge initiative leaps without feeling the need to verify accuracy. In extreme cases, there is denial of objective reality and fierce commitment to feeling and subjective interpretation. This is a passionate person. Rational thinking is usually considered con-

temptible. Basic statements are: "What I feel is real," and "I feel, therefore, I am."

Willful Subtype

Coincides closely with psychopathic attitude. Everything, including feelings and reason, is used to create and justify desired result. The final objective is set and reality, feelings, other people, reason, are bent and twisted until they lead to the predetermined objective. In general, this subtype will use will-power to reinforce characterological attitudes and defenses. Basic statements are: "I want, therefore, I'll get," and "I must get it or die trying."

It is possible that in his choice of a dominant modifier a child may be reacting to the environment in a counter-selective way. That is, if the dominant modifier used by the mother is reason, the child will negate this as an invalid means of communication. For instance, a child whose perception is met with reason will consider reason to be the least desirable means of communication. Therefore, he will block reason and opt for emotion or will. The same can be said for the other modifiers.

In addition to the dominant modifiers there are secondary ones. Thus, people use reason *and* emotion or emotional *and* will. It seems a viable hypothesis to me that the modifier excluded corresponds to the secondary modifier of the weakest parent, because this frustrated the child's balanced growth, while the child internalized the modifiers used by the strongest, most threatening

The dominant modifier of choice would, I believe, be the one common to *both* parents.

Now let's see what happens when we apply the modifiers to the character structures. The rational masochist will have a totally compulsive structure which is rarely seen in therapy, as the motivation for change is limited. They are sometimes called "anal compulsives." They are very rational within the limited framework in which they allow themselves to function; when anxiety develops, they deal with it in a compulsive fashion. The defense mechanism is extremely strong and there is very little drive for change.

With the willful masochist, we have an individual who reinforces endless endurance and will-power. We know that the etiology of masochism precluded expansion and that expansion is the solution to the masochistic issue. If will is used to reinforce holding, prognosis is doubtful. However, if the client can be made to fully understand the problem at the conscious ego level, the will-power can be turned around into the service of the expansionary forces and great progress can be expected.

The emotional masochist will typically expand and collapse. The masochism will tend to collapse the structure and the emotionalism will tend to expand it. This person is in conflict. This is the masochist most frequently seen in our offices, for this person feels the possibility of freedom intuitively and believes that the emotions he perceives are real

The typical oral structure used passivity and spite to manipulate its own feelings in order to serve its spite. Reason is used to justify the passivity. Rationality is the most typical modifier for this defense structure, for reason requires less energy than will or emotion. With rational orality, it is possible to increase the total energy available to the organism. Then rapid change can be expected. However, much work must be done on the distortions and misconceptions that have accumulated as a result of the spiteful passive behavior developed over the years.

Prognosis for the emotional oral is quite good for, while the energy is low, the tendency to passivity, the expectation to "get it" from the outside, and the spite all remain, there is a deep intuitive knowledge that expansion and reaching out is a necessary function of life. Therefore, the basic character attitude is frequently challenged by the modifier. While anxiety may be quite high, prognosis is much better than for a purely rational oral structure.

In the case of the willful oral structure, there is extremely spiteful holding. In effect, the oral statement "give it to me" becomes "you must give it to me," or "I'll make you give it to me."

Schizoids tend to try to understand since they are not in contact and reality testing is poor. However, there are schizoids who are very emotional. I recall one who could only cry at our first meeting. Obviously, the basic modality of

emotions. The feelings swell up in this type of person and literally overwhelm him. However, prognosis is relatively good, as in therapy a new balance is gradually struck between emotions and reality. As this new balance is found, the personality becomes more and more organized. The scattered hyperexcitability gradually comes under the aegis of the natural schizoid tendency to understand, and reason takes hold, allowing a balance.

The willful schizoid uses will-power to reinforce the weakened ego boundaries. In other words, she desperately holds together by sheer will-power. Of course, this is a very weak system if it is used to contain primary processes, and the individual lives in constant terror of being overwhelmed. Thus, the rigid, terrified aspect that many of these people present. The person experiences the need to willfully create a barrier, which in reality becomes a barrier between herself and the world instead of a barrier between ego and id. This is exactly the case of the schizoid who holds

does so and accomplishes it at an extremely high cost. This person experiences herself as having to use all of her will-power to simply keep the ego boundary intact.

The rational schizoid displays a plate-type armor. This type has basically lost contact with her body, its feelings and perceptions and, as a consequence, basic reality testing is deficient. Reason is used to compensate but the datum input is deficient and massive distortions result. Unfortunately, there is very little contact with feelings and intuition. There is little faith that things can be changed. This schizoid attempts to understand life rationally to the exclusion of deeper intuitive perceptions. Withdrawal from reality causes distortions of reality, which lead to further withdrawal.

These are only some of the possibilities. There are many more and by superimposing equally valid frames of reference, sometimes very deep and valuable information can be obtained.

Andre Leites