

NERVOUS SPEECH DISORDERS IN THE LIGHT OF CONFLICTS AND SHOCKS, PSYCHO-NEUROSES, SUGGESTION AND AUTO-SUGGESTION

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Stammering in the past was attributed to a purely physiological cause. From 1716 practically to the days of Freud (the beginning of the 20th century) it was attributed progressively to unsoundness of the muscles of the speech organs, weakness of the soft palate, uvula, and root of the tongue; abnormal formations of the tongue (to be cured by operation), malformations of the tonsils, incorrect respiration, spasm induced by the weakness of the motor organs of the larynx, and tongue, spasm of the respiratory organs, spasms of the glottis which then imparted themselves to the muscles of the tongue, face and throat, spasms of the articulatory muscles, tetanus of the muscles connected with respiration and voice production.

From these purely physical causes, the functioning of the brain began to be considered as part of the problem; i.e., a disproportion between cerebral influence and spinal action, and so gradually it came to be grouped in the psychic sphere, involving a disturbance of the will. Thus, up to quite recent years, little was known except that the affliction is of a psychic nature induced by a disturbance of the will the cause of which has remained unexplained up to quite recent years. The view which considered the cause to be in the speech mechanism (throat, larynx, tongue, etc.), may be looked upon as definitely abandoned.

Stammering is now considered a phobia with dread its essential point. Due to Freud's psycho-analytical treatment this neurotic trouble is being cured, in some cases. Steckel, Adler, Jung, and others are convinced that the therapeutics of stammering can only be psycho-analytical.

The term "complex" has been much used lately in psychology. Perhaps the simplest definition of a complex is that it is a group of emotionally tinged ideas partially or entirely repressed, an interpretation of images, sentiments, memories, conscious and unconscious reasonings, interlacing one with another, and to all appearances inextricably intertangled. These ideas, colored by profound emotional feelings have been gradually relegated to the unconscious because they were of a distinctly painful nature, and so could not be kept in consciousness. It is our nature to run away from distressing thoughts and purposely try to forget them. These complexes, especially the buried ones, in memory groups gathered throughout the years of experience, determine our actions in uniform and easily prophesied directions. The sum of our complexes make up our total personality.

At the root of speech lie the emotions; the impulses of love, hate, joy, fear. Speech is secondary to emotion but is the most important outlet for the emotions to the properly balanced brain.

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If this means to express emotion is wanting, an abnormal psychic condition is set up and a marked tendency to retire from the world asserts itself; in other words, a complex is formed.

Freud believes that the complex arises before stammering sets in; in other words that it is a prerequisite for stammering. He says it is an unconscious complex forcing its way between syllables and words, caused by inner resistances which hamper free utterance, and is formed in childhood as a pure dread neurosis based upon sex or an erotic emotion, which terms he uses synonymously. He says that actual stammering often begins when the child feels under obligation to hide from its parents an action or a discovery of a libidinous nature. Psychic conflicts of this kind interfere with normal innervation, and are therefore considered the first cause of stammering.

Appelt believes that a shock, a fright or disease alone never produce a permanent impediment of speech, but thinks that psychic conflicts going on over a long period have now, from a temporary weakness of the nervous system, a favorable opportunity of forcing their way into innervation. He believes that imitation, though done wilfully and continuously, cannot produce the impediment, unless the imitator has the same complex as the stammerer. In this case it is called the *phenomena of hysterical identification*.

The complex will attack the weakest spot first. If the speech nerves are weakened owing to heredity, a shock, or diseases like the whooping-cough or diphtheria, the complex will use these weakened nerves as channels for its floods of emotions. Introversion is brought about as a result of the affliction. Thereupon follows: (1) increased play of the imagination; (2) the condition of expectant attention coupled with dread. These two things bear an important relation to the affliction of

stammering. Over-sensitiveness and a feeling of inferiority also aggravate the struggle.

The psycho-motor superstructure of the organs of speech fights a continual battle with the influences of the emotional complex, and consequent upon successive victories or defeats, the stammerer experiences ups and downs, good and bad days. The repression of the emotional complex has been brought about by the forming of compromises (as in stammering), so that a lasting inferiority results, allowing the patient but a limited adaptation to his environment.

ASH'S IDEAS ON STAMMERING

According to Ash, stammering is dependent upon states of mind, restlessness, and a badly tuned brain. He says it is necessary to establish a new habit to replace the old, to open up new links and paths of nervous impetus in the brain. The stammerer has a bad habit of nerves and muscles.

He believes that:

1. The will-power must be increased and the control of the muscles, particularly those of the breathing apparatus.
2. Patient should learn abdominal breathing and how to use it.
3. Should attain confidence. Re-educate the nerve cells and muscles so that they work in entirely new combinations.
4. He must give up his mental haste and physical tension: in other words, the stammerer must make a radical change in his present habit of mind and body. He must have a comfortable relaxation of the body and calm poise of thought.
5. Suggestion and auto-suggestion should be used to assure the patient that his nervous system and vocal apparatus are perfect. Breathing and speaking exercises are important, but the most important is psychological re-education.

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The principle of suggestion is valuable as self suggestion. Faulty mental attitude leads to stammering, but most usual is the idea of self-weakness backed up by a steadily growing morbid self-suggestion of helplessness.

Ideas of harmony, self confidence and their kind are valuable in all cases of stammering.

BAUDOIN, SUGGESTION AND AUTO-SUGGESTION

Suggestion is a work which proceeds wholly within a subject. A suggester is not essential to suggestion. It may be defined as the subconscious realization of an idea. Suggestion should be looked upon not as a power for dominating others, but as an instrument for self-mastery.

There is a psychological condition prerequisite to all auto-suggestion: this is that the idea should have a notable intensity, an intensity which is mainly the outcome of attention. An idea upon which attention is peculiarly concentrated is an idea which tends to realize itself. An idea introduced into the mind, or one which we have ourselves voluntarily introduced, will produce its effect as the sequel of subconscious activities at the close of a shorter or longer period.

Suggestion is a phenomenon exhibiting three phases:

1. The idea of modification.
2. The work of realization performed unconsciously as far as the actual ego is concerned.
3. The appearance of the modification that has been thought.

Suggestion is an idea which subconsciously transforms itself into a corresponding reality. Every state which engrosses the mind tends in one way or another to secure external expression for itself, a concentrated energy which wishes to diffuse itself. An effective

state cannot be externalized unless the obsession is transferred. A visible object, a symbol is substituted for the unduly abstract emotional object, and the suggestion then runs its course.

Frequent repetition of action facilitates the particular motor discharge. Auto-suggestion facilitates the state of intoxication. By being afraid that he cannot give up the habit, that he will drink again, the drunkard continues his habit. Striving against a thing is an infallible method for engulfing us more hopelessly in the quicksand.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Law of Concentrated Attention.

The idea which tends to realize itself in this way (through spontaneous suggestion) is always an idea on which spontaneous *attention* is concentrated.

2. Law of Auxiliary Emotion.

When, for one reason or another, an idea is enveloped in a powerful emotion, there is more likelihood that this idea will be suggestively realized.

3. Law of Reversed Effort.

When an idea imposes itself on the mind to such an extent as to give rise to a suggestion, all the conscious efforts which the subject makes in order to counteract this suggestion are not merely without the desired effect, but they actually run counter to the subject's conscious wishes and tend to intensify the suggestion.

4. Law of Subconscious Teleology.

When the end has been suggested, the subconscious finds means for its realization.

5. Spontaneous auto-suggestion is a phenomenon of every-day occurrence.

The state of natural sleep is extremely favorable to the development of spontaneous auto-suggestion.

We should keep watch of our spontaneous auto-suggestions; we should control our thoughts, checking the undesirable ideas which would transform themselves into noxious suggestions

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(ideas of weakness, poverty, impending misfortune, illness).

REFLECTIVE SUGGESTION

The key to the whole situation is the idea itself. We ought then to be able to guide auto-suggestion as we please, by substituting voluntary attention for spontaneous attention. This is not easy. Emotion cannot always be present.

Voluntary effort essentially presupposes the idea of a resistance to be overcome. It comprises both action and reaction. Thus we do not think a single idea, but two conflicting ideas. Coué comes to the rescue with his law of *reversed effort*. He says: "When the will and the imagination are at war, the imagination invariably gains the day." He says further that the will must not intervene in the practice of auto-suggestion. This recommendation is absolutely essential. There should be re-education of the imagination, not of the will.

The new Nancy School does not substitute auto-suggestion for the will but superadds auto-suggestion to the will. This must not be confused with voluntary effort.

The problem is to find out how to realize the conditions wherein the desired suggestion will come into being with the minimum of effort; how to find an equivalent for voluntary attention. The use of the will is impossible. There should be *relaxation*, suspension of inhibition, and outcropping of the subconscious.

Education of the Outcropping: Collectedness.

Instead of seeking repose in *distrac-tion*, which rests the attention by changing its object, but continues to keep the attention employed, let us seek repose in *relaxation*, in which the attention no longer seeks to fix itself on anything. This will teach us to avoid

making any effort, and effortlessness is a habit we must acquire if we are to practice auto-suggestion. Muscles should be relaxed.

DISCUSSION

Freud's theory for the cause of stammering is one which in the light of present knowledge it may be as well to accept. We certainly cannot deny or even find a plausible substitute for it. We may have a private notion that stammering arises first followed by complexes instead of vice versa, as Freud believes. We feel that Ash is making rather vague statements when he says that stammering is dependent upon states of mind, restlessness and a badly tuned brain. Many of us may feel, especially at times, that we answer this description, and yet we do not stammer. Also the intelligence of the average stammerer might revolt especially at the "badly tuned brain." In order to satisfy our logical sense, we may insist on the presence of a sub-normal, weak nervous system, as a predisposing cause for stammering — fertile soil as it were for the complex to develop in and work on.

However this may be, it is the *cure* and not the *cause* of stammering which primarily concerns us here. Psycho-analysis is doing great good. We are hardly in a position to know whether it actually is or is not curing stammering. Authors seem to disagree on the subject. It is a fact, however, that psycho-analysis is a very special subject which must be thoroughly learned. The personality of the individual is a great factor in successful treatment, and it is believed by some that only men of medical training should be trusted in this regard.

While Ash's points are very well taken I feel that psycho-analysis is not the only way in which to attack the problem successfully.