

The Birth of Schizophrenia in the Family: When Conflicting Messages Hurt

Margarita Oikonomakou*

Università eCampus/Psychologynow, Greece

*Corresponding Author: Margarita Oikonomakou, Università eCampus/Psychologynow, Greece.

Received: November 05, 2019; Published: November 21, 2019

Abstract

The paradoxical command works this way: "I love you, he said with a hateful voice. Hug me, he said with his hands crossed".

Multiple researches and theories have demonstrated that the most important relationship a person will develop since birth is the bond with its caregiver, whether interests the biological mother of an infant or the person who will take care of the baby and that will constitute the baby's secure base and he that it will develop the attachment bond. Thanks to this relationship a child will be able to grow biologically and psychologically, becoming a functioning adult.

Keywords: *Birth of Schizophrenia; Messages Hurt*

Research has also demonstrated (infant research) that the mother-child relationship begins before the birth of the baby (pre-natal attachment) and that the child has already a biological preference towards the mother since birth (recognizes her voice, smell, and breast milk).

From this point on, as a child grows up, it will receive countless messages from its parents, both verbal and non-verbal, that will affect and shape its development and perception of the world. There are numerous studies and theories that seem to confirm the importance of the relationship with the caregiver and the quality of the relationship for the child's normal mental functioning.

Naturally, the relationship with the mother will sometimes be disrupted, (as we know from the contribution of Tronick's studies about the mismatching moments with the mother) whether we are talking about simple syntonization ruptures in the relationship that are in immediate repair (mismatch and re-joint) or more serious ruptures, such as those that will lead to a distorted and interrupted relationship with the mother (attachment disorder). Those moments of natural discordance are not enough though to talk about a non-healthy environment. Many children deriving from dysfunctional families don't develop dismissive personality disorders.

What are the elements that could be the basis for future disorders?

Research up to date has been occupied about the birth of schizophrenia and many theories position the disorder within the contradictory messages that the parents transmit.

The first theories

Frieda Fromm-Reichmann in 1948 developed the theory of the schizophrenic mother. According to her observations, the characteristics of these mothers were excessive rigor, distance and emotional rigidity. These mothers did not respond to the child's attempts for phy-

sical contact and emotional needs, even though they seemed particularly cautious and overprotective towards their child. Reichmann's first observations describe a mother as „selfish” and “hostile”, a mother who accepts the child only under certain conditions, especially if it lives near her, without any autonomy. These mother were primarily the cause of the dismissive mind of the child and schizophrenia was seen as a failure of integrating the “good and bad object”.

After almost a decade, John Rosen, founder of Direct Analysis in his article “The perverse mother” has occupied of mothers of patients with schizophrenia attributing them a „profound perversion of maternal instinct”.

Furthermore, research also investigated the paternal characteristics that could contribute at the birth of dissociation. Specifically, Theodor Lidz at 1957 mentions five different typologies of the paternal model, amongst them the type of father who transmits hostility, the one who generates in the child feelings of failure, and the one with a hypertrophic sense of ego.

The double bind theory

The double bind theory is the result of a collaboration of one of the brightest people and his team deriving from a different professional background founded by Gregory Bateson.

In 1952 Bateson was able to obtain substantial funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, which allowed him to hire his first two associates, Jay Haley, a communications specialist, and John Weakland, a chemical engineer and anthropologist, with a keen interest in Chinese culture. A year later he joined William Fry's team as a consultant. In 1954 the research funds ran out and the need for new funding forced scientists to narrow the scope of research to the study of schizophrenia.

The double bind hypothesis emerged two years later, in 1956, after the publication of an article by Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland entitled “A Theory of Schizophrenia”. The purpose of this article was to propose an explanatory model of schizophrenia through the concept of dual relationship, changing the primer consideration about the schizophrenic syndrome and consists a radical change on the point of view of the classical psychiatric approach.

The double message

This form of paradoxical communication, which is affronted and shaped as something perfectly logical, leaves no escape room for those who remain ,trapped’.

So, for the first time, the belief that schizophrenia is the result of endogenous conflicts or is purely due to hereditary factors is questioned, shifting attention to the relationship interactions and to the family dynamics created in a morbid interaction.

The double bond, according to Bateson's theory, should meet some specific characteristics:

- 1) It should concern two or more people who are involved in a strong emotional relationship (for example, mother-son).
- 2) It should concern a message that is transmitted by the parent and it's designated by:
 - a) A prime negative command, which can take the form “Do not do this otherwise I will punish you” or “If you do not do it I will also punish you”.
 - b) A secondary command that contradicts the first one at a more abstract level, and its transmitted by a non-verbal communication (facial expression, eye contact, body position)
 - c) A negative third command, prohibiting the victim from abandoning the order or elaborate the command cognitively so that can be set free from the pattern that defines the message.
- 3) Repeating the experience. The trait that differentiates a person trapped in a double-bonded state of schizophrenia, is frequency. The conflicting message is not something that took place as an occasional episode but consists the field that most of the messages will occur and it will become the usual way of communicating in which the most important interactions take place.

Therefore, the double bind, to become pathogenic, must not be an isolated trauma, but a recurring experience in one's daily life.

It should be noted that a few years later, the authors will clarify that in fact the double bind theory is not a causal theory of schizophrenia, but rather a model that allows the generalized mental disorder to be explained in a communication theory and whose focus is malfunctioning communication processes. Schizophrenic syndrome was used as a specific example to illustrate a more general case.

Bateson's theory was the first attempt to explain psychopathology in a systemic way, focusing on the family dynamics and has shifted the attention from the patient to the whole family helping to prevent stigma.

Although the double bind theory was very important for the development of systemic psychology, it has several limitations.

This unilateral image of a „persecutor“ exercising his power over the „victim“ has been disputed by various researchers. Weakland, in a 1960 article, for example, has stated that one who is described as „victim“ soon learns to use similar forms of communication with those of the mother and in turn sends as well distorted and paradoxical messages, thereby helping to maintain the general patterns of communication and interaction, typically found on families of people with schizophrenia, helping maintain the dysfunctional relationship stable.

Two years later, in “A Note on the Double Bind”, the authors themselves made an important clarification on the binary nature of the double bond. The theory, in fact, considers only two relational positions: the person having the double bond and the subject having to deal with it, without taking into account other dynamic, triangular relationships and the general equilibrium of the family system.

In addition, the double bind theory does not provide the criteria that explain why a family member develops a particular psychopathology. This is because the double bond only provides the interaction between two entities, thus excluding the other members of the relational system.

Genetic factors

The genetic component seems to play an essential role in the etiology of schizophrenia. The risk of developing the disease in the families of schizophrenic patients is 5 - 10 times higher than the general population. Twin studies have shown much greater concordance rates among monozygotic twins (MZ) (50 - 60%) compared to dizygotes (DZ) (10 - 15%), in agreement with the proportion of genes in common. The heritability of schizophrenia, roughly estimated at 80%, tends to decrease with the use of more restrictive diagnostic criteria and in the analysis of specific subtypes, while remaining significant in all studies and it is always considered an important factor in clinical assessment.

The study of genetics in psychiatry is enriched also by the contribution of molecular biology. These methodologies are based in the “DNA markers”, present in the DNA in the form of frequencies in various forms. The markers present two advantages: a very large distribution in the whole genome and an elevated grade of variability. By being distributed in small intervals, is possible due to the linkage analysis (Linkage analysis aims to identify a chromosomal region that contains a gene that can be susceptible for pathology), to obtain a precise gene localization.

The theory of mind approach

The theory of mind is referred to one's ability to attribute mental states to oneself and to others. Mental states are beliefs, emotions, intentions, and desires and recognize that another person can have different from one's own. The theory of mind is fundamental for human interaction, because it permits empathy, allowing us not only to represent mentally other people's mental states but also to “get in their shoes”, feeling and sharing their emotions. Some disorders such as autism, ADHD, cocaine addiction present deficit of the person's mind theory. Current research supports that patients with Schizophrenia show severe deficits in theory of mind. Specifically, during the negative symptoms, patients can show a lack of emotions, numbness, and fail to represent mental states. It is also suggested by further

research that patients have low insight about their mental illness, something that requires the ability of theory of mind. In fact, research posts out that patients with schizophrenia fail to complete the first and second order belief tasks -Belief tasks is an instrument used to evaluate the mind theory mostly in children [1].

Meta-analysis [2] has also demonstrated that patients in remission still present a mind theory deficit, which can explain the difficulties in social interaction on psychotic patients.

The neurobiological hypothesis

More recent theories have pointed out the involvement of neurotransmitters in psychotic syndromes.

Initially it was believed that schizophrenia depended on a problem related to dopamine. Subsequently, the researchers noticed the important role of glutamate, in addition to that of dopamine [3]. The glutamatergic theory was therefore proposed, which hypothesizes that schizophrenia depends on a glutamate hypo-function in cortical interactions. In other words, a reduction in the normal function of this neurotransmitter in the cortical region of the brain.

In recent years schizophrenia has been related to alterations in glutamatergic neurotransmission, although the precise association has not yet been well defined. The glutamatergic theory of schizophrenia therefore offers us a new possible cause and treatment of this mental disorder, where the protagonist becomes the glutamate mechanism.

This hypothesis revolves around a hypo-function of the neurotransmitter called glutamate.

The glutamatergic theory of schizophrenia does not exclude the dopaminergic hypothesis; indeed it completes it. It claims, in fact, that in the case of glutamate hypo-function, an increase in dopamine occurs.

Glutamate neurons generate impulses that are then inhibited by γ -aminobutyric acid (GABA), which thus prevents over-activation and excess glutamate. This process prevents neuronal death and is altered in cases of schizophrenia.

It is to be said though, that we don't yet know with certainty the correlation between the disorder and the neurotransmission malfunction. Is schizophrenia born from a lack of neural function or is it expressed biologically in the brain after its birth [4-17].

Conclusion

There are many approaches that have attempted to explain the causes of schizophrenia. After the expansion of the neuroimaging methods of the brain we have increased monitoring and understanding of the cerebral areas of the brain for various disorders. Also, neurobiologically, we know that mental disorders affect the homeostatic composition of the brain, giving us a more clear view of the disorder. It is thought to be considered whether the disorder affects the mind, or the mind gives birth to the mental disorder. The hereditary genetic transmission of every mental disease is well demonstrated as it is known from genome studies in twins, so we do have an approximately 30% of probability to have a mental illness. The biopsychosocial model considers all areas of the illness, assessing the biological, psychological and social factors of every syndrome, but it is to be said that the precise factors that trigger the expression (even if it is written in our genes) of the schizophrenia. Bateson was the first one to attempt to explain the birth of the mental illness within the family, setting a systemic point of consideration, shifting the responsibility from the person transporting the illness to a wider consideration of the family subsystem. We can say that his approach was a step towards the elimination of stigma about mental illness, and although there is a variety of approaches and theories about the expression of the schizophrenia, the increasing knowledge must not leave outside the intrapsychic conflicts of the individual, as well as its environment, its personal history, and its temperamental aspects. Sometimes the vulnerability is a factor that comes from the family experiences and the environment that we position ourselves.

Bibliography

1. Pickup G and Frith C. "Theory of mind impairments in schizophrenia: Symptomatology, severity and specificity. *Psychological Medicine* 31.2 (2001): 207-220.
2. Sprong M., et al. "Theory of mind in schizophrenia". *British Journal of Psychiatry* 191.1 (2007): 5-13.
3. Lieberman JA., et al. "Provocative tests with psychostimulant drugs in schizophrenia". *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 91.4 (1987): 415-433.
4. Barch DM and Ceaser A. "Cognition in schizophrenia: core psychological and neural mechanisms". *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 16 (2012): 27-34.
5. Bartha R., et al. "Measurement of glutamate and glutamine in the medial prefrontal cortex of never-treated schizophrenic patients and healthy controls by proton magnetic resonance spectroscopy". *Archives Of General Psychiatry* 54 (1997): 959-965.
6. Bateson G., et al. "Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia". *Behavioral Science* 1 (1956): 251-264.
7. Bateson G and Jackson D. "Some varieties of pathogenic organization. In Disorders of Communication. Research Publications". *Association for Research in Nervous and Mental Disease* 42 (1964): 270-283.
8. Bateson and Gregory. "Versailles to Cybernetics". *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1966): 477-485.
9. This is what mammals are about. They are concerned with patterns of relationship, with where they stand in love, hate, respect, dependency, trust, and similar abstractions, vis-à-vis somebody else". (2012).
10. Francesco Tramonti. "Steps to an Ecology of Psychotherapy: The Legacy of Gregory Bateson" *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 36. 1 (2018): 128-139.
11. Galton F. "The history of twins as a criterion of the relative powers of nature and nurture". *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 5 (1875): 391-406.
12. Silver and Ann-Louise S. The 2000 Frieda Fromm-Reichmann Lecture: "The Current Relevance of Fromm-Reichmann's Works". *Psychiatry* 63.4 (2000): 308-322.
13. Weakland JH. "The 'Double-Bind' Hypothesis of Schizophrenia and Three-Party Interaction". In DD Jackson (Ed.), *The etiology of schizophrenia*. Oxford, England: Basic Books (1960): 373-388.
14. Kirov G., et al. "Neurexin 1 (NRXN1) deletions in schizophrenia". *Schizophrenia Bulletin* 35 (2009): 851-854.
15. Myerson A. "The Inheritance of Mental Diseases". Baltimore, Williams & Wilkins (1925).
16. Kallmann F. "The Genetics of Schizophrenia: A Study of Heredity and Reproduction in the Families of 1,087 Schizophrenics". New York (1938).
17. Faraone S and Tsuang M. "Methods in psychiatric genetics". In: Tsuang M, Tohen M, Zahner G, eds. *Textbook in Psychiatric Epidemiology*. New York: Wiley-Liss (1995): 81-134.

Volume 8 Issue 12 December 2019

© All rights reserved by Margarita Oikonomakou.