

THE DOROTHY R. BLITSTEN CORRESPONDENCE

The Oskar Diethelm Library
DeWitt Wallace Institute for the History of Psychiatry
Weill Cornell Medical College
525 East 68th Street
New York, New York 10065

Arranged and described by:
Janice Quinter
October 1987

Provenance

Dorothy R. Blitsten donated the correspondence involving herself, Lionel Blitzsten and Harry Stack Sullivan to the Archives of Psychiatry (now the Oskar Diethelm Library), New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center in 1969. There are no restrictions regarding use of the papers for publication purposes.

Biography

HARRY STACK SULLIVAN was born on February 21, 1892 in Norwich, New York and was graduated from the Chicago College of Medicine and Surgery in 1917. His psychoanalysis was with Clara M. Thompson. He worked variously for St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington, D.C. as a veterans' liaison officer, 1922-1923; Director of Clinical Research, Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital, Baltimore, 1930-1939, and was in a private psychiatry practice in New York City, 1939-1949. He was an early member of the Washington-Baltimore Psychoanalytic Society. In 1938, he established the William Alanson White Psychiatric Foundation in New York City. It supported the Washington School of Psychiatry and *Psychiatry*, which Sullivan edited.

While attending Johns Hopkins University's Phipps Clinic he was influenced by Adolf Meyer, who conceived of mental disorders as reaction patterns to life situations confronting the sufferers. It was not long before Sullivan became an acknowledged master in his field and began to overshadow Meyer himself. Very early in his career, Sullivan abandoned Freud's pleasure principle, and, along with it, most of Freud's ideas on psychosexual development. With assistance from anthropologists and sociologists, he developed a psychiatric system that stressed

social forces as determinants of personality traits and psychological disorders. Sullivan looked upon the "interpersonal event" as the unit of psychological study. He also differed from Freud in his belief that free association was subordinate to direct communication between patient and therapist. He attempted to apply psychiatry to the study of social problems and took part in the 1948 UNESCO study of "tensions that cause wars." He served as a consultant in establishing psychiatric examinations for recruits for the Selective Service System in 1940. He is widely published. Sullivan died on January 14, 1949, in Paris.

DOROTHY RUBOVITS BLITSTEN was born in 1907 and was a psychoanalyst with a Ph.B. from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. from Columbia University. She was Associate Professor of Sociology at Hunter College. In addition to extensive training in psychiatry, her background includes pre-medical work and two years of medicine. Blitsten's books include *Psychoanalysis Explained*, 1936 and *The World of the Family: A Comparative Study of Family Organization in their Social and Cultural Settings*, 1963. She was married to the prominent psychiatrist, N. Lionel Blitsten.

LIONEL BLITZSTEN was one of the pioneers of psychoanalysis in the United States. He was the first president of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Society, which he helped to found. His main impact on American psychoanalysis is characterized by the direct personal influence he had on students and associates. Blitsten was born in 1893 and died in 1952.

Scope and Content

The letters were written principally by Harry Stack Sullivan to one or both of Drs. N. Lionel Blitsten or his wife, Dorothy R. Blitsten and date from 1932-1944. The letters discuss professional and personal matters. Some mention psychoanalytic developments in Chicago. A few letters were written by Ernest Hadley and others and are dated 1939-1966. The collection is comprised of two folders with 24 letters written by Sullivan, in addition to an unpublished manuscript written by Dorothy Blitsten about Sullivan. Notes and correspondence written by Eric Carlson about Sullivan and the manuscript are included in the collection.

Inventory

Box # 1

Folder 1	Correspondence with Harry Stack Sullivan	1932-1944
2	Correspondence with Ernest Hadley and others	1939-1966
3	Unpublished manuscript "Harry Stack Sullivan the Man and His Part in a Professional Revolution, A Memoir" by Blitsten	1966
4	Notes and correspondence of Eric T. Carlson, news clipping	1966-1977