

asked to nominate the three people in the hall of residence with whom they had had most social contact and in each case to indicate whether that person was considered a 'close friend'. The Eysenck Personality Inventory was also included in the questionnaire because Moss and McEvedy (1966) had found that 'Neuroticism' and 'Extraversion' influenced susceptibility in the epidemic of hysteria which they studied.

Nominated friends	Nominating students	
	Emotionally disturbed	Not disturbed
	n = 30 students with 3 nominations each	n = 103 students with 3 nominations each
(a) Emotionally disturbed		
None	15 (50%)	58 (56%)
One	10 (33%)	33 (32%)
Two or three	5 (17%)	12 (12%)
(b) Reciprocated relationships		
None	7 (24%)	22 (21%)
One	10 (33%)	35 (34%)
Two or three	13 (43%)	46 (44%)

Emotionally disturbed students did not nominate proportionately more students who were also disturbed than students who denied any disturbance (see Table (a)). This was also true when the analysis was confined to 'close friends' only. Nor were the mean 'N' and 'E' scores of the nominated friends of emotionally disturbed students significantly different from those of the friends of students who denied any disturbance.

There was no evidence that emotional disturbance impaired peer relationships. Emotionally disturbed students did not perceive fewer of their nominated contacts as 'close friends', and they had their nominations reciprocated as often as those who denied any emotional disturbance (see Table b)).

Since the dancing manias of the Middle-ages it has been recognized that mental disturbances can be communicable. Brief outbreaks of epidemic hysteria still occur occasionally, and on the basis of epidemiological evidence it has been suggested that the rapid rise in the rates of parasuicide may be due in part to case-to-case spread (Kreitman, Smith and Tan, 1969). Young females are believed to be most

susceptible to case-to-case spread. Yet there is no evidence from this study that they affect each other with less dramatic and more common forms of emotional disturbance. It is true that mundane neurotic symptoms are found with excessive frequency in the spouses of neurotic patients, but of course relationships between these students were very different from marital relationships in duration, intimacy and role sharing, to name but a few factors which may favour transmission of symptoms.

When almost a quarter of a population report that they have been 'nervously unwell or emotionally disturbed' and yet there is no evidence of associated impairment in their peer relationships, it can only be assumed that the disturbance in the majority was mild. This prevalence rate is of the same order as that found in the large field surveys of psychiatric morbidity carried out in the late fifties and early sixties by Taylor and Chave (1964) for example, the significance of whose findings have remained controversial. Perhaps transiently unhappy people are a little too ready to label themselves 'unwell' or 'disturbed'.

In conclusion, there is no evidence that common forms of emotional disturbance which are neither severe nor dramatic spread within social networks of young adults living together.

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#### References

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#### CORRECTION

In the paper 'Averaged Evoked Responses in Relation to Cognitive and Affective State of Elderly Psychiatric Patients' by Elaine Hendrickson, Raymond Levy and Felix Post (*Journal*, May 1979, 134, 494-501) Table III on p. 498, column 9 should read 1.0, 0.93, 0.85 and in column 10 the last figure should be 0.96.