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## Reviews

also chose mates who could give them the best satisfaction. The genes thus passed along gave modern man the biggest penises among primates.

Fisher is vague about how long a time this all took. She suggests that it began about 8 million years ago, just about the time the fossil record goes blank for 4 million years. She seems confident that the bonding process was already well established 2 million years ago, when *Homo erectus*, a definite ancestor of modern man, was populating the earth. Fisher might have been more specific about that long process. She may face fire from linguistic specialists: she assumes that there were deep conversations between her couples about 1.9 million years before most language historians think the art was born.

Its sweeping hypotheses notwithstanding, the book is more fun than most anthropology works, popular or otherwise, and ultimately settles on a rather benign view of man and woman. Fisher compiles a rather good, and quite fair, history of anthropological research. She examines the latest theories and professional controversies, usually without taking sides. But there are no killer apes on her territory. Lover apes, yes—enough of them to breed plenty of controversy. —M. M.

### Psychiatrist of America

by HELEN SWICK PERRY  
Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, \$20

Chenango County, a remote area at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, had the highest suicide rate in rural New York state in 1908. The local newspaper reported that poison was the most popular method, because the survivors did not have to clean up the blood. That same year, one Chester Gillette was sent to the electric chair for drowning an unmarried Chenango girl when he discovered he had made her pregnant. This deed was immortalized in Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*.

It is understandable that Chenango-born Harry Stack Sullivan would leave this troubled setting, as he did in 1908, beginning a convoluted journey that would one day make him one of America's best known and most controversial psychiatrists. As Helen Swick Perry stresses in her examination of Sullivan's life, "The raw data for much of Sullivan's [theories] came out of the rural life of Chenango County in the first half of the twentieth century as surely as Freud's theory came out of Vienna in the preceding half century."

Perry was Sullivan's editor for his journal *Psychiatry* for three years be-

fore his death in 1949, and afterward spent almost two decades piecing together the scattered puzzle of his life. What makes this story so compelling is its brutal honesty about Sullivan's tainted past. He was, in the end, a man who overcame failings that were rooted in an isolated childhood and later in a mysterious two-year disappearance.

Sullivan was an only child, the son of a shy, withdrawn father and an overprotective mother who was eager for him to bring honor to the family. Sullivan once said that "she had no use for me except as a clotheshorse on which to hang an elaborate pattern of illusion." His childhood was spent on an isolated hill farm. This made the precocious boy more at home with his books than with other people. At school, he was labeled teacher's pet. And as the lone Irish Catholic boy in a Protestant town, he was teased for the brogue he had picked up from his grandmother.

Harry's troubles first developed when he was 16, in the crucial year of 1908 that started so brilliantly and ended in disaster. That was when Sullivan graduated from high school as valedictorian, and



Harry Stack Sullivan in 1935

won a scholarship to Cornell. Yet he was suspended from the university during his second semester. For two years, he disappeared. His whereabouts between 1909 and 1911 remains unknown to this day. County gossip has it that the lonely, rejected farm boy fell in with a bad crowd at the university, sold something illegal through the U.S. mails, and chose to declare himself insane to avoid jail. Sullivan himself made only veiled references later in life to a "schizophrenic

MARGARET LOURDE-WHITE

break" that forced him to be hospitalized. He finally turned up at the Chicago College of Medicine and Surgery, where his marginal grades barely earned him a medical degree.

Those trying years may have laid the foundation for Sullivan's career in psychiatry. In December 1922 he arrived at the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital, a psychiatric institute in Towson, Maryland. There he set up a program for the care of schizophrenic men, victims of trauma, loneliness, and ostracism that haunted his own early life.

Sullivan's plan for therapy hinged on selecting ward attendants who were shy and sensitive, very much like himself and his patients. The employees were taught that schizophrenics should be treated as friends. That would supply the sense of intimacy the patients may have lacked in pre-adolescence. Sullivan came to Sheppard "almost a fledgling in psychiatry," writes Perry, "but by the time he left he was a legend in both the clinical world and the world of the social sciences." The reason was clear: his patients tended to get well.

Despite his success, Sullivan remained an enigma. To his enemies, he was an abrasive eccentric who lived on the brink of bankruptcy and whose love of brandy bordered on alcoholism. They called him "only a skilled therapist, who acted in an intuitive way, nothing more." To his fellow psychiatrist Clara Thompson he was "a gentle, warm, friendly one. This was the side he showed his patients. Anyone who has seen him talking with a disturbed catatonic can know that he has seen the real Harry without pretense or defenses." Sullivan, it seems, was the personification of his own theory that "every human being has as many personalities as he has interpersonal relations."

Sullivan held that the beginning of each stage in the developing human being represents an opportunity to correct the distortions of the preceding stages. Mental illness, he said, could arise from continuing cultural forces on the personality, not necessarily (as Freudians stressed) from just one past traumatic experience. As the title of the book implies, it was a concept that arose out of the American experience.

The evolution of these ideas, despite Perry's valiant study, remains hidden. Sullivan, a critic once wrote, "is one of the least widely known of great men . . . his ideas have spread more rapidly than his fame." But where is the interpretation of those ideas and how do they stand up today? Perhaps a sequel could answer those questions. —Marcia Bartusiak



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