

THE FIRST OFFICIAL  
PSYCHOANALYTIC SOCIETY IN CALIFORNIA

by

Albert Kandelin, M.D.

Following tradition established elsewhere, California's psychoanalytic progress moved from a Study Group to an official Society. The Study Group came into being in the mid thirties, a predecessor to the several Psychoanalytic Societies we have now in California. The tradition I refer to has established the use of the title, "Study Group" for the preliminary organization, and "society" for the official and fully accredited chapter of the American Psychoanalytic Association. Here I propose to relate the history of California's first Society, accepted as a constituent of the National body during May of 1942. My sources are mainly the papers and letters of Ernst Simmel of Los Angeles, one of its founders and charter members, also its first president.

Simmel had arrived in Los Angeles in 1934, a fugitive of the Nazi persecution. His medical and psychoanalytic career had already been a distinguished one in Europe, and included founding with Eitingon in 1920, the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. In Los Angeles, he was the principal among the founders of the Study Group of 1935, also its first president.

His correspondence reflects his active life as an organizer with reams of letters to and from colleagues in San Francisco, Topeka, New York (and all the national offices). Proposals, procedures, problems - conflict, compromise, failure, success - all the vicissitudes of organizing his fellow analysts are reflected in these letters. I must be selective, for the sake of brevity, and choose the high spots. My mention of Topeka refers to the Topeka Psychoanalytic Society (founded in 1938) centered at the Menninger Clinic. Several California analysts were charter members including Simmel, Fenichel and Tidd. Until the Californians achieved autonomy in 1942, the Topeka Society held jurisdiction over their activities.

Lawrence Kubie, National Secretary writing June 1938, said to Simmel, "it is hard to transmit on paper the general spirit and atmosphere of a meeting (Council on

Professional Training, Chicago, June 2, 1938); but there was a feeling of warm and enthusiastic appreciation of the service which your group has been performing for psychoanalysis on the West Coast and a whole hearted understanding of the special problems which confront you." He was referring to the problems of the non-medical analysts in the California group, and went on to sketch out the national association's new policy in this matter: "when the time comes that closer affiliation between the Los Angeles Group and the American comes under consideration, certain difficulties such as these will have to be resolved. And it would probably make it much easier to eliminate such difficulties if no new laymen were accepted for training from now on. New Minimal Training Regulations are being adopted by all the constituent societies including a Resolution against the future training of laymen. You will note that this is not unfairly retroactive." This official policy was clearly spelled out, but such a directive hardly solved the local problems of how to organize when a considerable number of the members were lay analysts.

In September 1939, Robert Knight of the Topeka Society wrote suggesting a record be prepared of the lay analysts, their standing, capability, training, etc. "Technically we have no connection with them.....but we must work out some friendly association and supervision." Simmel replied with enthusiasm and suggested it be extended to include the several who lived and practiced in San Francisco.

In June 1940 a memorandum refers to the "particular situation of the psychoanalytic movement in California," a clear reference to the lay problems so acknowledged as follows: "ill feeling existing against the acceptance of lay analysts as ordinary members." Some feared creation of a loop hole, for admission of lay analysts rejected elsewhere, or the possibility lay members would outnumber the physician members, or the potential of conflict with medical authorities. Simmel extended the acknowledgement that "lay analysts in Los Angeles have actually the merit of having liberated psychoanalytic practice from the quacks." He proposed organizing a Society according to the national requirements and referred to the statement from the Council of Professional Training - "the solution of the problem for Los Angeles should be through the organization of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society by ten recognized and properly

qualified physician analysts. After the admission of such a Society to the A.P.A. it would be left to the discretion of the Los Angeles Society to accept such layman as were adequately trained or in training prior to June 1938." In his June 1940 memorandum, he proposed overcoming objections by a system of supervision and consultation by the physician members, aimed especially to eliminate complications with medical authorities, or critical attitudes from medical analysts either local or elsewhere.

Until an official Society could form and be recognized, the jurisdiction over California affairs resided with the Topeka Society. From that source came pressure in January 1941: "it becomes more apparent to us here that the best eventual solution will be for you to form a Society of your own in California. It is becoming increasingly impractical to direct or supervise psycho-analytic activities in California from this distance. It would be possible for a California Society to deal more adequately with the lay problems." A committee had been formed to prepare discussions for founding a California Society (Bernfeld, Kasanin, Tidd and Brunswick) and he addressed them as follows: "I have no doubt that the authorities of the A.P.A. taking into consideration the specific circumstances in California, and the role the non-medical analysts have played in the movement here, will have no objections against their later admittance, particularly if we accept voluntarily the restrictions I have proposed. I refer especially to those of standing before June 1938."

From San Francisco Kasanin wrote the opinion of their members (January 21, 1941): "it seems then that it would be more rational to include as charter members in the California Society both medical men and lay analysts who are qualified for admission to the Society. We definitely wish to have laymen in our Society." The San Francisco climate appeared more liberal and less conflict laden, and in a letter to Kubie (February 12, 1941) Simmel mentioned opposition in Los Angeles to admission of non-physician analysts. He gave the opinion the objections came from some who feared recrimination from the national authorities - a fear he himself considered groundless - and further he expressed his loyalty to the lay members, crediting them with starting the analytic movement in California and creating a medical centre for the training of psychiatrists. His

view was supported in turn by Kubie who assured his support and ventured his advice: "I do not think it is possible to ask the Council on Professional Training of the A.P.A. to pass on any individual layman. This has purposely been left in the hands of the individual societies.....the A.P.A. has never had any specific jurisdiction in the matter. The basic principle is the autonomy of the individual societies, limited only by the minimal standards and by the resolution with regard to the future training of laymen. If your constitution is clear on these points none could imagine any doubt of the acceptability of the California group."

Reporting to Menninger (April 1, 1941) Simmel apologized, "I am sorry we Californians will continue to be a burden for some time to come. The circumstances in California are such that the local analysts are not yet sufficiently mature to govern themselves. We are still in adolescence and that is, as you know, an awkward age. Just give us one more year to get a grip on ourselves and in the meantime please continue to guide and advise us." And he added his report on the state of the lay controversy with an interesting point - "the lay analysts realize that the main difficulty in granting them the recognition they deserve lies in their great numbers.....it would be unfair to both the lay analysts and the psychoanalytic movement in California to found a society with a tendency of ignoring the lay analysts. If such a stand were ever taken both Bernfeld and myself would withdraw immediately from the psychoanalytic movement here." He felt the problems relating to the lay members could be taken care of through a gentlemen's agreement, implying they would forego charter membership, even ordinary membership, but without sacrificing their status and privileges as qualified analysts.

In June 1941 Robert Knight writing as president of the Topeka Society appointed a committee to investigate the factors involved in forming a California Society and proposed to come to Los Angeles in August to chair its first meeting. Simmel's response summarized the situation with the following formulation, which focused upon the central problem which had to be met - the integration of the lay analysts into the proposed new organization. He recognized the new national rule against further training of laymen but equally insisted upon the rights of those non-physician analysts who were trained before June 1938. He considered it a special situation in

California, with laymen making a majority. He proposed a category of membership for them differing from that of ordinary membership, and urged they have voting rights and even charter membership. However he recognized some compromises may become necessary.

With Knight presiding, the organizing meeting was held in Los Angeles on August 23, 1941. The organizing Committee appointed by Knight in June consisted of himself, plus Tidd, Fenichel and Simmel of Los Angeles and Berliner and Kamm of San Francisco. A report of the meeting begins with a discussion of the possibilities of forming two Societies, one in each city, which was rejected in favor of a common Society. Simmel's proposal for accredited membership without voting privileges for non-physician analysts was accepted. Rejected by a vote of three to one was his further proposal of regular membership for distinguished non-medical analysts. (In this vote Knight and Fenichel abstained). In a general way the relative acceptance of the lay group appeared to be a satisfactory compromise and in accord with statements Simmel had solicited from them before the meeting. Bernfeld had written to him: "The California Society should have unambiguously a medical character. Non-physicians will have to renounce many of their rights.....but one can hardly feel as belonging to the Society if one were deprived of the rights to influence the selection and the policies of committees guiding training and teaching." Other non-physician members had responded in essentially the same terms.

At this point it would be a pleasure to say the establishment of a California Psychoanalytic Society was essentially complete, and that the constitution as drawn up at the August meeting was shortly approved and ratified by the national body. Unfortunately, further problems and frustrations arose, the bete noir again, or still, the problem of the lay analysts. I hope to condense successfully, and briefly present the concluding events. After all they were finally solved and eventually a Society came into being

In 1941 Psychoanalytic practice in California came under the scrutiny of the State Board of Medical Examiners, probably resulting from the activities of a number of practitioners we would now consider improperly trained. In San Francisco there was said to be a training program

for both physicians and laymen, without the sanction or direction of the American Psychoanalytic Association. This group called itself the California Psychoanalytic Association, and it was said to have support in a considerable degree in political and academic circles. One of its aims was to introduce a bill in the legislature to legalize its training program. Simmel saw in this the threat to the development of analysis in California along accredited lines, and felt all the more the urgency to hasten his plans. Simmel himself, accredited but unlicensed, was investigated. Some threats and pressure were made against him, but his practice was never interrupted. As a foreign physician he was not admissable to California Licensure on a convenient basis. Some foreign physicians were admitted to examination for the Medical License only after serving one year's internship, which Simmel anticipated doing in 1941. In these times of trial much support and advice came to Simmel from colleagues elsewhere, especially Knight and Menninger in Topeka.

As a result of the State Board's investigation, even though inconclusive and not a certain threat, several of the physician analysts had serious reservations about participating in the organizational process. These physicians advised a policy of consulting the State Board on the issue of the proposed accredited membership for lay analysts, hoping thus to insure the security of the new organization, and its members. Simmel felt this course was wrong, and considered it better to proceed without consulting the State Board. He anticipated the Board would never interfere in the practice of an accredited and qualified analyst, medical or layman, and in this he was supported on a national level. However the support of a group of three Los Angeles physician analysts was lost at this point.

Knight and Menninger still eager to get the California group organized emerged as peace makers. Knight mentioned "conflicting loyalties and affiliations". Menninger advised concession and compromises and urged the formation of a Society along the lines proposed in August. In spite of their efforts, matters dragged along, and the new year, 1942, saw the problems still unsolved.

In the spring of 1942 a list of ten for charter had been formed now heavily weighted from the San Francisco end. (The three in Los Angeles who abstained from charter formation were

Romm, Tidd and Haenel. In this way they expressed dissatisfaction with the handling of the lay problem; after its formation Romm and Tidd shortly joined the new group). The list of ten, all physician analysts, had six from San Francisco, two from Los Angeles and one each from Seattle and Arizona. From San Francisco were Barrett, Berliner, Kamm, Kasanin, MacFarlane and Windholz; from Los Angeles were Simmel and Fenichel; from Seattle was Orr; from Tucson was Gero. About January 1942 the northern members had assumed the initiative, now inviting their colleagues in Los Angeles to join in their efforts, using the constitution drafted the previous August. For the sake of unity Simmel would have preferred a group designated California rather than San Francisco. There were other reasons to call it the San Francisco Society; to avoid confusion if a future society were formed in Los Angeles, to reduce the influence of potential opposition in Los Angeles, to facilitate an aim of including non-medical analysts. On the last point the position of Bernfeld in San Francisco was the dominant element; a non-medical analyst yet the recognized leader of the analytic movement in that city - an outstanding teacher, very well accepted by the local medical profession; not to mention his record of scientific achievement. His colleagues in San Francisco were not willing to participate in any plan which would disturb Bernfeld's status, and Barrett was quoted as saying, "he would prefer no society at all to one which would put Bernfeld in a secondary status."

In May 1942, Simmel attended the national meeting in Boston to present the application of the California analysts, which meant presenting the proposed constitution as drafted in August. The proposed category of accredited membership for lay analysts was not acceptable. Otherwise there was no objection and the application was favored, and finally ratified by the other constituent societies. Thus the attempt to include provision of accredited lay membership in a nationally ratified constitution failed. The new local society was free to solve their own problems in their own fashion, within the limitations imposed by the minimal standards provision of the A.P.A. pertaining to lay analysts trained prior to 1938, and reserving training thereafter to physicians.

Further discussion of the lay problem must be deferred; my aim here has been to recount the events leading up to the organizing and founding of California's First

Psychoanalytic Society. It is true this was a prominent issue, a problem which had to be met and was eventually solved. I think of it as an interesting chapter to the historical lay analysis controversy which was one of Freud's principal preoccupations in the last phase of his life. In Ernest Jones biography of Freud, in Chapter 9 in Volume 3, entitled Lay Analysis, reviews the events around this controversy during and after Freud's lifetime. Jones clearly outlines Freud's aims, clarified some misinterpretations, and refers to it as "a central dilemma in the psychoanalytical movement, one for which no solution has yet been found."

Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Society  
Committee for History  
April 1965