Brit. J. Psychiat. (1982), **141**, 425–431

Correspondence

WHAT SCHNEIDER REALLY SAID

DEAR SIR,

The investigation reported by Lewine *et al* (May, 1982, **140**, 498–502) and some of the studies to which they and also Berner and Küfferle (June, 1982, **140**, 558–65) refer, are based on a misunderstanding of Schneider's First Rank Symptoms in Schizophrenia.

Reading once again the relevant section in the 1959 translation of the 1956 edition of Schneider's book, and comparing it with the seventh German edition of 1965, has confirmed that this misunderstanding does not arise from any faults of the translation. It just will not do to take in isolation as a starting point of any research the statement where Schneider proposed a group of symptoms, which when "undeniably present and no basic somatic illness can be found . . . make the decisive clinical diagnosis of schizophrenia", as was done by Lewine *et al*.

It would lead too far to summarize Schneider's views on the meaning of "symptom" in conditions whose psychopathology, alone, was known at his time, or to expound his views on the provisional nature of our classifications of the endogenous psychoses. It shall suffice to quote from p. 133 of the translation: "Among the many abnormal modes of experience that occur in schizophrenia, there are some which we put in the first rank of importance, not because we think them to be "basic disturbances" but because they have this special value in helping us to determine the diagnosis of schizophrenia as distinct from non-psychotic abnormality or from cyclothymia. The value of these symptoms is, therefore, only related to diagnosis; they have no particular contribution to make to the theory of schizophrenia, as Bleuler's basic and accessory symptoms have or the primary and secondary symptoms which he and other writers favor". Later, he disclaims the existence of a common structure for all these symptoms of first rank importance. Schneider (p. 134) does wonder, however, whether loss of identity, diffusion of thought, and all passivity experience may not be regarded as a group which presented the "lowering of the barrier between the self and the surrounding world . . .". This proposition might perhaps be tested more specifically by Lewine *et al* employing not (as reported in their paper) all their 100 subjects, but only the 80 who had a Catego diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Schneider made it abundantly clear that he regarded differential diagnosis between schizophrenia, cyclothymia, and intermediate conditions as a matter concerning the use of definitions rather than of basic understanding. He chose as symptoms of first rank only those which could be clearly and sharply identified, while recognizing that there were schizophrenics without them. Thus, he did not include among his first rank symptoms affective flattening, incongruity, or formal thought disorder. It was for this reason that so much weight was given to Schneider's first rank symptoms by workers in epidemiology when they constructed their present mental state measures. The nature of first rank symptoms, and why they sometimes occur in patients who cannot be given a diagnosis of schizophrenia, are matters which should be investigated, for instance, by testing the interesting German hypotheses summarized by Berner and Küfferle, among them the concept of dynamic derailments.

FELIX POST

7 Leeward Gardens,
London SW19 7QR

HYSTERECTOMY FOR MENORRHAGIA

DEAR SIR,

It is unclear how Dr Gath and his colleagues (*Journal*, April, 1982, **140**, 335–50) validated the "menorrhagia of benign origin" for which the women in their study underwent hysterectomy. The assumption that women who complain of heavy periods actually suffer from a significant increase in menstrual blood loss is the crucial factor that has bedevilled both research into, as well as management of, "Menorrhagia", and its clarification is particularly relevant when such a high proportion of women with this complaint are shown to be psychologically disturbed.

It is easy to understand why a woman will feel miserable when she becomes anaemic as a result of haemorrhage from a pedunculated fibroid and why she should feel better following its removal. On the other hand, a woman who is miserable for other reasons may be sensitive to a relatively minor change in her menstrual pattern and also complain about this; she might even have a small, unrelated, fibroid: not only would this also be called "Menorrhagia of benign