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Publications

'Containing Anxiety in Institutions'.
London: Free Association Books: 1988

'The Dynamics of the Social. London:
Free Association Books, 1989

Social Systems as a defence against anxiety: An update

The introduction reviews the background to the paper described in the title, its antecedents and its reception (Menzies Lyth, 1988). It considers reactions to the paper in terms of development of work towards modification of defences and reduction of anxiety. The paper reviews the author's position in relation to such developments and comments on where she herself now stands. Finally, the paper relates this to changes in her work.

These changes concern particularly an extension of her use of psychoanalytic theory in consulting to organizations. The adult personality is laid down during the early months and years. Traces of these early experiences remain in the adult's personality and are re-enacted throughout his adult life. The needs and tasks of the infant in his early years are described and related to how they are met. 'The good ordinary family' with 'an ordinary devoted mother' gives the infant the best chance of emotional and intellectual health. Some characteristics of the 'good ordinary family' are described and related to organizations and how they meet the continuing needs of the adult. In consultancy, changes in the organization would reflect 'the good ordinary family' including how it deals with anxiety, an ongoing process in the here and now.

The conclusion bemoans the decline of the good ordinary family in society and outlines briefly some of the negative personality features among people who have grown up in less favourable circumstances. These features are re-enacted in society and organizations. They have a negative effect on the way organizations function and on the experiences of members. Illustrations are given from the British National Health Service. The negative effects include greater resistance to change and make work harder for consultants.

Reference: Isabel Menzies Lyth. *Containing Anxiety in Institutions*. London: Free Association Books, 1988