

Lecturer argues:

Schizophrenia invented, not discovered

Debbie Bodinger

Schizophrenia wasn't discovered, says Dr. Irwin Silverman, it was invented. Silverman, a professor of psychology here at York, recently spoke for the York Psychology Colloquium series. He said that schizophrenia is not a disease, it's a label that society uses to deal with "surplus and nuisance populations".

"At its inception," Silverman said, "schizophrenia was an ideological rather than a medical concept. It served socioeconomic and political rather than medical purposes."

It is generally acknowledged, he stated, that the "contemporary mental health movement began with the demise of witchcraft". But the transition, Silverman pointed out, was not a direct one. Between the age of the torture chambers of the Inquisition and that of mental health professionals was an "age of secular confinement". Hospitals and retreats arose that were used as "dumping grounds for nuisance populations: vagrants, orphans, vast numbers of unemployed."

But these institutions were not attended by medical personnel. Only after a hundred years or so did physicians begin visiting these "houses of confinement" looking for a common medical denominator among those confined.

Among these physicians was Kraepelin, who pooled together

reports from his colleagues on the behaviour of the inmates and described a syndrome he called "dementia praecox". Silverman said Kraepelin's description "was discursive, descriptive and wide ranging... (it was) replete with contradictions... at one point he (Kraepelin) tells us 'that patients are unattentive, their thoughts frequently wander,' in another he said, 'their attention is fixed' (on only one thing at a time)".

"Dementia praecox" was later re-named "schizophrenia", and according to Silverman, "definition and diagnosis is no more precise today than at the

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time of Kraepelin." Textbooks of psychiatry, he said, admit that there are no reliable criteria for the diagnosis of schizophrenia. In fact, Silverman said, studies have shown that the odds of two psychiatrists who independently assessed the same patient agreeing on their diagnosis, are

only slightly above chance.

Descriptions of symptoms, he said, are sufficiently vague that the behaviour of a normal person in a stressful situation (such as might be experienced during an involuntary psychiatric interview) can be easily interpreted as "schizophrenic". "Any disagreement with an examiner over the motives or intents of others can qualify as a delusion," he

said, "So can an exaggeration or a lie... a figure of speech ('myskin is crawling') can be taken as an hallucination."

Finally, there is what Silverman terms "the Supreme Catch-22: lack of insight" (failure to recognize the severity of one's problems). While "lack of insight" is not listed in the texts as a schizophrenic symptom,

Silverman said, a "World Health Organization survey found it the most frequently cited symptom in psychiatric reports... you need merely to disagree that you are not mentally ill. If you say you are,

90 per cent of schizophrenics are merely the misfits and non-conformists that society has always seen fit to confine.

you are. If you say you aren't, you are."

While perhaps 10 per cent of those labelled "schizophrenic" act in a way that most of us would agree is "unequivocally bizarre", Silverman stated that the other 90 per cent are merely the same "nuisance population" (vagrants, non-conformists, etc.) that society has always seen fit to confine.

"The most important factor," Silverman said, "in whether or not someone acquires the label 'schizophrenic', is whether the examiner wishes to bestow it. It is entirely in the eyes of the beholder."



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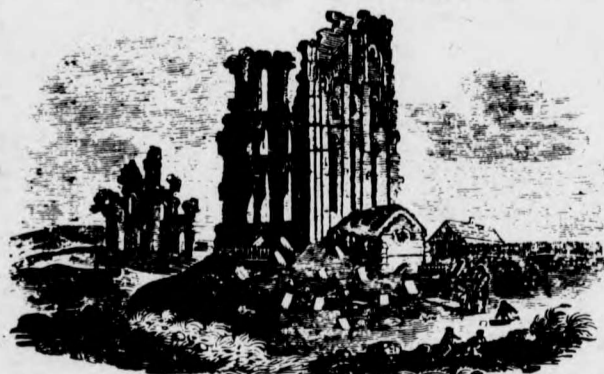
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YORK UNIVERSITY PROGRAMMES IN ISRAEL

INFORMATION MEETING: TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1980
1:00 - 2:30 p.m. Vanier Senior Common Room

President Ian Macdonald invites students to an information meeting to discuss the York University-Hebrew University Exchange, programmes of study and scholarship grants.

Dr. Dov Friedlander of the Hebrew University, together with York students who have studied in Israel, will be present to answer questions, relate experiences and provide detailed information.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Leonard Wolinsky Scholarships

Given annually to two York students for one year's full-time study in Jewish Studies at an Israeli university. Value of the award is \$2000.

Hebrew University Scholarship

Given annually to a York student for one year's full-time study in Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Value of the award is tuition and room.

All three scholarships are open to any full-time York student, who has completed at least one full year at York. Preference will be given to students completing their second year of full-time studies and who are concentrating in Jewish Studies.

To qualify students must meet faculty requirements for study abroad and be accepted by an Israeli university.

YEAR ABROAD PROGRAMME

Under the York University-Hebrew University Exchange Programme, York University would like to establish a York student group at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for next year. Such a group might be able to assist students in planning their programmes of study and with other arrangements for and during their year abroad. Should the number of students warrant, there will be a resident advisor in Jerusalem.

When and Where to Apply

Enquiries for the Year Abroad Programme, the Leonard Wolinsky Scholarships, and the Hebrew University Scholarship should be addressed to

Prof. Lewis Rosen, Chairman
365 York Hall
Glendon College
Telephone 487-6254

Scholarship applicants should submit a statement of purpose, outlining the projected programme of studies in Israel and explaining how that programme complements their studies at York. Also required for submission are transcripts of all previous university courses taken and two letters of recommendation, one of which must be from a York faculty member. A personal interview may be required.

Scholarship applications should be submitted no later than January 15, 1981 for awards to begin in September 1981. Awards will be announced on or about March 15, 1981.

N.B. Students should consult calendars of the Hebrew University in preparing their programmes of study. One is available on request in Vanier 236.