

## **Chapter IX**

### **Structure and Methods of Individual Psychology<sup>1 2 3</sup>**

[1932]

The lack of understanding shown in vague critical remarks about Individual Psychology resembles a projective test taken by a prejudiced amateur psychologists. In psychology, intelligence cannot be excluded as a prerequisite for accepting new ideas and experiences. I advise my friends to avoid taking critical remarks sitting down. For instance, some people have commented about the philosophical insight of Individual Psychology. Those who have only a limited knowledge of philosophy will agree with William Stern that Individual Psychology is philosophy. However, when sometimes we find people in our group who give opponents the catchword, the opponents react immediately. The wrong impression is established, as if Individual Psychology has nothing to do with philosophy. The same is true for structure and methods. I have found in many papers such poor references that it looked as if the method of Individual Psychology still had to be established. I have nothing against positive contributions; however, I have never found anything worthwhile from those who approached the subject in a bragging way. When I say that we cannot succeed in Individual Psychology without a sharpened understanding and rational penetration, I demand a great deal from every Individual Psychologist, namely, that he recognize if one of such dunces tries to elevate himself to high standing and authority. Nobody should believe that such attempts escape the sharp observation of Individual Psychologists.

We consider psyche a metaphysical construct. We interpret the psyche as that part of life which contains all its moving structures. Above all, the psyche consists of movement as seen in space and time. This movement is goal-directed, a concept we have introduced in

<sup>1</sup> Lecture for the Society of Individual Psychology Physicians, Vienna, 1932.

<sup>2</sup> Originally published as "Die Systematik der Individual Psychologie" in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Individualpsychologie*, Vol. X, p.241-244, 1932.

<sup>3</sup> Translation by Sophia J. de Vries, 1995.

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modern psychology for many years as teleology. Movement without a goal is unthinkable. No other school of psychology has said more about man's psyche than can be found in these few words. Because movement means change, a systematic observation focuses on the beginning and the end of every part of the movement. The beginning is the incomplete situation, insecurity, or inferiority, while a striving for completion is found in every expression. Thus, we may conclude that Individual Psychology uses a strict method in its ongoing utilization of a strong structure that cannot be pierced. This strong structure is one that no other psychology reveals. This concept of goal-directed movement existed from the beginning of Individual Psychology.

We consider the self as a unit which creates itself, using all possibilities, impression of its incompleteness, and influence of the organs to reach an attitude which we consider a congealed movement. We can see this "self" only "in relation to," because it is always responding. Questioned and presented with problems by the environment, it responds in its own way. This response occurs in situations created in the community. Clearly, the accomplishments of the individual regarding those problems, which always demand social interest, do not result in an ideal solution, if the individual is not socially well prepared and adjusted. In our changing, multi-faceted environment, we find many external factors which present questions to the individual. Our evaluation of the "self" consists of observing a person's response to the questions his social environment presents, thereby showing the development of his social contact with the environment. This evaluation represents a big step ahead of all other psychological theories. Thus, when we have determined the external factors "correctly" and the individual's response to them, we have to evaluate the strength of his social ability which should have been developed earlier.

We have concluded that the degree of social interest, the desire to participate, is established in the beginning years of a child's life. Certain circumstances may promote social interest or block it, and mistakes may sneak in, preventing the individual's internal formation from responding appropriately to external social factors: friendship, work, and love. to respond to social exogenous factors. Psychological makeup is not inherited, but formed in the early years under the influences of organ inferiority and the environment, to which we do not attribute unlimited causal importance, but a "statistical probability." We evaluate all performances of a human being from two sides: 1) from the external

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demands, 2) from the psychological makeup. Out of the tension between these two sides develops the attitude of the individual in a specific situation, his positive qualities, and his mistakes.

Today I will talk about the main forms of movement in which people who have too little social interest express themselves; about the relationship between the internal and external factors in people who lack the ability to solve the tasks of life in a "correct" way. Also, in this respect we have advanced much further than others. We have observed that all the tasks life demands can be divided into three categories: the individual's attitude toward others, work and love. Religion belongs primarily in the first category, because the highest Being is worshiped, while everyday life is lived according to His laws; however, it also belongs to all three categories in the same way a work of art does.

Today, I will show which main categories of movement are revealed when a person lacks solid preparation for solving any of his life tasks.

A. First, the hesitating movement--or attitude--may be observed, measured by the type of rhythm and pace of action. At first glance, we can draw some conclusions with the help of our method. For instance, if a twelve-year-old child is merely a fourth grade student, we can conclude that he proceeds slowly, exceptional circumstances excluded. This slower movement may have a certain rhythm, manifesting itself as a character trait imperfect perseverance. If we do not observe uniform progress, then we conclude that some insecurity exists. This pattern is especially clear in someone who starts with great enthusiasm and gives up very soon, as in severe cases of manic depression.

B. The second model showing the individual's faulty relationship with others, the faulty relationship between internal form and external factors is distance. When someone has not yet found a friend at 20, does not yet have an occupation at 30, and has never fallen in love at 40, we can conclude that this individual lacks proper preparation for solving a specific task.

C. The third model of insufficient preparation is avoidance when a problem arises. In this group we find all failures. The strong educational influence of Individual Psychology resulted especially from the practical knowledge of this category, because we observed an unusually large number of cases where the child went astray in early childhood, and steps could have been taken to avoid his failures.

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D. With the fourth model, diminished interest and ambition reveal that the individual is not prepared for a whole problem and pulls it into small parts. This type of failed preparation always shows in a person's efforts to exclude certain aspects of a problem. Here we also find characteristics of all failures, not merely neurotics. A difficult child usually makes his mistakes the same way all the time, a pickpocket remains a pickpocket, a burglar always a burglar. We also have to consider diminished interest in such cases where the individual solves his problem partly by eliminating certain parts and occasionally by becoming ingenious in this way.

We must consider all these aspects in each case, avoiding the temptation to categorize people in specific groups, but rather understanding the mistakes of every individual. I would be curious to know what other psychological approach has such a closely knit structure. If we consider how very critical and skeptical Individual Psychology is, all reproaches about our insufficient methods are ridiculous. An opponent could not validly make such an objection. If sometimes our students make such references, this proves they have not penetrated far enough. Our methods are so thorough and far-reaching that we don't have to worry about overlooking important points.