

Letters

Dr. J. Brown
Managing Editor

Just a brief note to congratulate you and through you the Editor-in-Chief of *Alberta Psychology*, Dr. Jack Sikand, on your most recent edition. The issue was interesting, relevant and well done. The Psychological Association of Alberta is being very well served with this publication.

My best to my various friends in PAA.

Sincerely,
Terrence P. Hogan
Dean
Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Manitoba

Re: Editorial *Alberta Psychology*, 1981, 10, 3

Certainly one of the "achievements" in Alberta psychology is the operation of the Center for Advanced Study in Theoretical Psychology. . . .

Congratulations on your new format and content of *Alberta Psychology*!

Sincerely,
Leendert P. Mos
Professional Officer
The Center for Advanced Study
in Theoretical Psychology

I feel that your recent articles (Dumont, 1981; Hague, 1981) on Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration need clarification. Ms. Dumont gives the impression that "those whom society label as disturbed" can all benefit from Dabrowski's approach. Dabrowski intended this theory be applied only to a small, select subgroup of those labelled as mentally disturbed, the so-called group of psychoneurotics. The theory would not be appropriate for cases involving psychopathology, psychosis or mental retardation. To apply the theory as broadly and as loosely as Dumont and Hague do is clearly not appropriate (Dabrowski, 1971, p. 11).

The experience of pain is not the primary motivation for development. Psychological pain (inner conflict) is the result of an intrapsychic discrepancy between factors encouraging maintenance of the status quo and developmental factors (third factor, higher level values, perception of what "ought to be"). Pain is accepted as a sign that a discrepancy exists and is only encouraged in the context of fully elaborating this discrepancy. The appreciation of the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be is a major motivator of development.

A key point in Jackson's work which Dr. Hague failed to mention is that development proceeds from lower levels that exhibit high organization to higher levels initially of lower organization. This creates the disorganizing aspect of the development process. The new, higher levels are more complex and voluntary but are initially less well organized than were lower levels. As the new levels develop they become well organized and the uncertainty and conflict concomitant with disorganization abates.

Conflict, crises and "mental illness" are potentially creative to the extent that an individual can use the opportunity of disintegration to examine himself and reintegrate on a level closer to his personality ideal. The process is complex and depends on many factors that would seem to be constitutional for a given individual. Given this, therapy must first examine the individual's conflict and its causes, the pre-crisis level of development (biological, social and inner psychic), and in particular, the individual's developmental potential (Dabrowski with Piechowski, 1972). Therapy encourages an individual to actualize their full developmental potential. Therapy stresses self-education and the therapist is a guide to the developmental sequence and to the developmental significance and developmental meaning of various phenomena (e.g., conflict, ambivalencies, inferiority toward others, nervousness).

Dabrowski's theory is eclectic and therefore difficult to categorize. A good discussion of the theory in relation to other theories can be found in Dabrowski, 1972 (pp. 220-251).

Hague gives the impression that development through positive disintegration can be a free choice of an individual and that "it is the cognitive and emotional responsibility of the patient himself for getting in and out of illness" (Hague 1981, p. 8). The factors of development (developmental potential) are certainly not governed by the free choice of the individual. Rather, these relatively fixed potentials both determine and limit our level of development. The importance of free choice grows as a product of higher development and the increasing organization and function of autonomous mental processes. It is only in fairly rare cases of high level development that development itself can become an autonomous choice of the individual.

The therapist using this theory must show a deep intellectual and intuitive understanding of the theory; he must believe in its basic

philosophical approach. He must be empathetic, an empathy based on his own life history of possible disintegration and its management. I can not agree that every therapeutic relationship involves disintegration on the therapist's part. To empathize, understand and advise is possible without an internalization of the client's pain. As a developing individual, the therapist will experience disintegration autonomously, not in conjunction with his clients.

The Theory of Positive Disintegration is a complex theory of development, personality organization and therapy. The understanding of the Theory is not advanced by brief summaries and premature dissemination into clinical work. Hague identifies the need for elaboration of concrete criteria for recognizing developmental potential. While research in this area advances, we should guard against sacrificing clarity and meaning via premature application and brevity.

Yours,
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References

1. Dabrowski, K. *Personality Shaping Through Positive Disintegration*. Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1967.
2. Dabrowski, K. *Psychoneurosis Is Not an Illness*. London, Ghyf Publications Ltd., 1972.
3. Dabrowski, K. with M. Piechowski. *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development: Volume I Multilevelness and Positive Disintegration*. Oceanside, New York, Dabor Science Publications, 1972 (pp. 57-62).
4. Dumont, Judy. "In Search of Kazimierz Dabrowski." *Alberta Psychology*, 1981, 10, 4.
5. Hague, W. "Implications of the Theory of Positive Disintegration for Psychotherapy." *Alberta Psychology*, 1981, 10, 4, pp. 6-9.

From *APA Monitor*, 1981, 12, 5.

On Being Useful

Recently announced Reagan budget cuts in behavioral research training and services are forcing psychologists and other behavioral scientists to take more advocacy and political action than in the history of federal support for these disciplines. A special effort to illustrate the contributions of psychology to the national productivity has been launched. APA's Science and Technology Studies Officer, Stephen Nelson, is soliciting examples and illustrations of significant contributions made toward national productivity by psychology and related social/behavioral sciences.