

Receptivity Toward Dreikurisms

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People are rapidly becoming exposed to the theory and techniques of Individual Psychology through the writings of Rudolf Dreikurs. It seems to this writer that this assimilation takes place by degrees rather than through sudden insights. Adlerian psychology is learned through slowly overcoming personal and cultural prejudices, learning to decrease demands on people, and seeing—without condemning—the creative hidden purposes in symptoms.

No studies have been reported on the initial impact of the thought of Dreikurs upon a group of subjects unaccustomed to Adlerian premises. This paper presents the results of the agreements and disagreements of naive students when given a list of 159 aphorisms of Rudolf Dreikurs as a true-false test at the beginning of an undergraduate psychology class, "The Psychology of Marriage," at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas. None of the 46 students (20 male and 26 female) reported any familiarity with Adlerian psychology, beyond simple general statements. The instrument given was being distributed as a discussion guide in two classes. In the second class this writer had sudden thoughts regarding the receptivity of the class to these basic Adlerian premises: would the class show agreement? If disagreement was rampant, what would the patterning be like? What are the elements in Adlerian psychology which meet the most resistance and therefore need more emphasis? With these thoughts in mind, the list of Dreikurisms was simply announced as a noncompetitive true-false survey (i.e., no names on the papers) which would benefit the teacher more than the pupils.

Results

Of the 159 "true" maxims only two were responded to with complete agreement. All students agreed that "We must recognize the dignity of man," and "You push a child down by overprotection." Eleven items had 95% or greater agreement. On the other extreme of disagreement, 41 items were responded to with greater than 50% disagreement. The five items with greatest Dreikurs-pupil incongruity all questioned the "rational and good" way of looking at child and parent behavior.

Item	Percent disagreement
A child is never irrational or illogical in his behavior.	89
Women would be quite intelligent if they didn't happen to be mothers.	87
It is a handicap for a boy to have a successful father and a daughter to have a successful mother.	84
Mothers are intelligent about everything but their motherhood.	80
Talking is one of the most ineffective things to do.	76

High disagreement was generally noted on Dreikurisms which challenged the culturally accepted static intrapsychic views of mechanisms, diseases, and instincts (e.g., "A neurosis is a pretense of good intentions which you don't have," 74% disagreement).

Male and female differences were tested with chi square tests for two independent samples. Eight of the items had interactional differences significant at less than the .05 level. These sex differences were all in the direction of more female agreement with the Dreikurisms. As a group the eight maxims reflect a sensitivity for hidden purposes and the importance of transactions between people (e.g., "Nobody does anything he does not want to do." "If we have a benefit in being sick, we stay sick." "Identification means 'I trust you. I believe in you. I want to be like you.' ")

Conclusions

This study suggests that a group of college students unacquainted with Adlerian assumptions shows a great variety in the acceptance of these premises upon first exposure. They agreed with the items which did not seem to contradict cultural slogans. Statements which point out subtle parent-child maneuverings were met with disagreement. Females appeared to be more attuned to the here-and-now purposes of mis-behavior and the interactional quality of life. It may be that this interpersonal sensitivity is partly responsible for the great acceptance of Adlerian psychology among women. On the other hand, the more frequent absence of the father from the family council may mirror his relative insensitivity to personal transactions, as well as an assumed threat to his (often illusory) paternal authority.