

HUMANISTIC IDENTIFICATION:
A NEW TRANSLATION FOR GEMEINSCHAFTSGEFÜHL

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It may bet hat future generations will regard *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* to be Adler's most penetrating and basic concept, a legacy often ignored because of the uninspiring English substitute, "social interest." Interest appears too mild, volitional and intellectual; social too narrow, compliant and tethered by conventions and mores. In an effort to highlight the importance of Adler's concept for all facets of personality development, "humanistic identification" is offered as a more harmonious uniter of seemingly diverse concepts and professions.

In essence, humanistic identification refers to a process (not completed at the age of six or 60) characterized by a feeling of brotherly love or close kinship with other human beings in the present, as well as a strong affinity for the human race as a whole, past and future. Humanistic identification is demonstrated intellectually by "outsight," a commitment toward understanding the psychological needs of others and the tension generated by their lack of fulfillment; and by an active movement toward satisfying such needs and becoming a significant other.

Rather than use the phrase "mental illness" to label the patient's dissatisfaction with his behavior and/or society's discontent with the patient's actions, a construct based upon the client's position on a continuum from skin-tight identification to humanistic identification is recommended. In other words, mental illness must eventually be inferred from behaviors which prevent mankind from moving toward the molding of brotherly love, *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, or humanistic identification for all.

It goes without saying that these few words merely point out possible directions for research and that at present we have little definitive work on such inner processes and the necessary behavioral correlates. The postulated development of humanistic identification depends upon the presence of tension reducers, and even tension creators, who will tutor the client or helped-one in the art of oversight. One's style of life is maintained with tenacity, and the therapist, parent, or other person high in humanistic identification must be in

reality a tutor of values in word and action. Here we see the transcending of one spurious dichotomy, that of the educator and psychotherapist: both are dealing in human values. In this outline a few additional advantages of the humanistic identification idea follow.

1. *Attention to the content of social interest.* Humanistic identification avoids the picture of a desperate dowager trying to create a better personality image without real commitment to the human needs beyond the superficial calm of social niceties. Unfortunately in many circles the Adlerian is perceived as one who lives by the maxim of "Don't make waves." If the authentic Adlerian and the person high in humanistic identification are synonymous, ideally such a person makes no inordinate personal demands on others. But this in no way assumes that he cannot disapprove of narrow, skin-tight identification in others if he is willing to offer support and optimistic encouragement to the effect that actions can be learned which will result in more happiness if one will weather the anxiety of change.

2. *An end to an isolated concept.* Since isolation is the bane of Adlerians, even a concept such as *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* must be anchored in a field of ongoing research such as humanistic identification promises to do. The external and internal conditions, internalized sentences of Ellis (2), which strengthen and maintain both broad humanistic and narrow skin-tight identifications are a fertile, relatively unexplored field but one of promise for the Adlerian in psychology, sociology and education.

3. *Self-esteem revisited.* Perhaps we have been too content with the equation of the primacy of low self-esteem = mental illness. Does not high self-esteem in a narrow inept role mold the schizophrenic-prone individual? Left alone in the world, his misunderstanding of others would eventuate in low self-esteem, but first, in many cases of pampering, is the conditional "love" of the mother. And the lack of humanistic identification in one who has high self-esteem in skin-tight identification pursuits, can be a dictatorial menace to the world. The potential schizophrenic can manipulate mother at the price of his freedom: he learns that the world is evil beyond mother. The "successful" sociopath is well practiced in the reduction of tensions and becomes significant to many, but he reinforces hatreds in others. For the present we are left with an angel-and-pin analogy: how many significant others and of what degree of humanistic identification must one identify with before one generalizes like a paranoid or a practicing Christian (3)?

4. *Humanistic identification as a precondition for authentic religious practice.* Institutionalized religion is usually wary of "psychologizing," although there is no common anchor for this term. Perhaps it is taken to mean the "reality" of id impulses and/or "irrationality" of religious motives. Western religions gravitate toward the spiritual end of a spurious spiritual-human dichotomy, devoting their energies toward refining the rituals for man's devotion to God. The cause of man's needs and relationships is generally relegated to a minority of humanists within the churches or to popular humanistic organizations which are held together by hatreds of authoritarian religion and philosophical concern for the nebulous goals of mankind. All of this strife would be closer to solution if more emphasis were placed upon the untapped humanistic resources of the Judeo-Christian tradition, following the example of Adler (3). For the humanistic identification concept assumes that an authentic religious orientation is predicated upon Adlerian courage: concern for humanistic identification models propagating their values by assisting in the psychological need reduction of others. Without this broad human base there is only the magical-egotistical religiosity (1), itself so responsible for persecutions, wars, and the distrust of humankind.

By substituting humanistic for social one can circumvent Frankl's error of making some of value-actualization independent of man (1). Frankl paradoxically conceives of man as existing without the *sub specie aeternitatis* imperative. Only a person with narrow identification can abstract himself intellectually from the human race; but even then emotionally he feels isolated from past, present, and future. He is cursed with his narrowness, since humanistic self-esteem is predicated upon oversightful actions, and his very withdrawal reflects the influence of people, which is never really escaped by anyone. A quote from St. Augustine is a warning against religious fixations and an entreaty for humanistic identification. "To love each person as though you had love for him alone and to love all as though all were one."

SUMMARY

"Humanistic identification" is suggested as a better translation of Adler's *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* than "social interest" in that it affords a wider reference than "social" and avoids the connotations of conformity and gregariousness; and is not restricted to the mild, voli-

tional, intellectual character of "interest." It covers the intellectual, affective, and behavioral aspects of the optimal relationship to others, namely, understanding, empathizing with, and acting in behalf of others. It would seem to lead more directly to avenues of research and common ground with religion.

REFERENCES

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