

Psychotherapy Guidebook

ADAPTATIONAL PSYCHODYNAMICS

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Adaptational Psychodynamics

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DEFINITION

Sandor Rado's "Adaptational Psychodynamics" is an attempt to create a comprehensive, scientific mind-body approach to human behavior. Adaptation (in the Darwinian sense) is the key concept for Rado and it is defined in his theory as a process by which the organism comes to survive in its environment through achieving a functional balance between motivation and control. Rado believes that adaptations are "improvements in the organisms' patterns of interaction with its environment that increase its chances for survival, cultural self-realization, and perpetuation of its type."

For Rado, psychotherapy involves helping the patient to plan a better adaptation to his environment. Having patients learn to adapt requires their developing, through treatment, cognitive capacities ("the psychodynamic cerebral system") that permit conscious and purposive adaptation to reality. The specifics of the treatment process appear to be of lesser concern to Rado than specifying through theory building and research method, a medical science of psychoanalysis.

In Rado's theory, evolutionary biology is the foundation for the scientific study of the physiology and psychology of human motivation (Rado was influenced by the Cannon-Bard theory of emotion) and the organism's eventual ability to gain control over its biological and psychological interaction with the environment.

HISTORY

Sandor Rado was born in Hungary in 1890. He studied at the universities of Budapest, Berlin, and Bonn. In America he held several faculty positions, among them: Director of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute and Director of the Psychoanalytic Clinic for Training and Research of Columbia University. His two-volume work, *Psychoanalysis of Behavior*, states most comprehensively his theory of scientific psychoanalysis.

At Columbia University he was thought of as an inspirational, if somewhat eccentric, teacher. He developed a training curriculum for medical psychoanalysis and strongly felt that all medical doctors should be trained in scientific psychotherapy.

Rado believed that Freud's original investigative procedures of self-analysis and the analysis of his patients had to be subjected to the strict scientific method in order to create a systematic theory acceptable to medical science. Adaptational psychoanalysis was a result of Rado's "re-examination,

re-systematization and re-wording of Freud's theories prior to 1905.

TECHNIQUE

Treatment requires the psychotherapist to impress upon the patient the difference between his infantile and his realistic life performances. Interpretations help to achieve recognition of infantile responses as unadaptive and to teach the patient "adaptive insight," which is the development of reason and control evolving into adaptational behavior. Treatment goals include: "helping the patient toward self-reliance"; "to plan a better adaptation"; and to "instill confidence and hopeful expectation."

Rado's technique of treatment is unlike Freud's and has even been generally viewed as a conscious psychology and not a depth psychology. Because Rado's theory and technique support a concept of organismic utility, many critics view the development of adaptational responses as too focused on purposeful control of pleasure, pain, emotion, thought, and desire. The implication is that control can be achieved through thoughtful adaptation alone. Rado does not appear to give sufficient status to the independent power of unconscious motivation.

APPLICATIONS

Rado's pioneering research in schizophrenia and his theory of

“schizotypal organization” (schizophrenic-phenotype) paved the way toward contemporary psychiatric views of schizophrenia as a disease entity that exhibits the “interaction of genetics with environment in a specified developmental context.” Rado’s work seems best applied to psychiatric disorders whose correlates are more obviously mind-body related. His research in drug addiction and the addictive personality are significant observations of mind-body interaction in addictive disorders.

Critics of Rado argue strongly that his biologically based adaptational view does not hold up within the more psychodynamic disorders, i.e., characterological disturbances and schizoid orientations.

Rado’s work is reflected quite clearly today in the understanding and application of biofeedback; sleep and dreams research; and in the continuing development of scientific methods to uncover mind-body relationships in psychiatric disorders that appear to have both genetic and physiological correlates.