

# Chapter 6

## Psychobiography, Self-knowledge and “Psychology as a Rigorous Science”: Explorations in Epistemology, Clinical Practice and University Education



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**Abstract** In 1911 Edmund Husserl declared, that philosophy—due to false commitments to naturalism or historicism/world view philosophy—had not been able to found itself as a “rigorous science” by identifying its own real topics, epistemology and research methods. “Naturalistic attitude” with its explicit methodological and implicit epistemological/ontological consequences influenced psychology similarly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is continuing nowadays with the growing expansion of neurosciences or “evidence based” therapies. Psychology—instead of trying to define its own real topics, own methods and declare its real scientific position—is still compulsively intending to accommodate to natural sciences, while, as a contradiction, practicing psychologists mostly use “human science psychology” approach, because the real nature of their subject forces them to apply contextualist and historical-interpretative methods. Psychobiography as an idiographic, qualitative, contextualist method – beside its usefulness in creativity research—can be beneficial for psychology in general. It might help psychologists to realize what their science is really about with ontological, epistemological and methodological consequences (“psychology as a rigorous science”). Psychobiography can fill the gap between the academic approach of university training/research and clinical practice, and also supports the development of therapeutic attitudes. Studying an individual life in depth always shows what human existence is about, and the necessary self-reflections during psychobiographical researches facilitates self-awareness and self-understanding too.

**Keywords** Psychobiography · Epistemology · Scientific research · Therapeutic activity · University training of psychologists

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## 6.1 Introduction

Fourteen years ago Dan McAdams (2005) emphasized, that psychobiographers should learn methodological precision and other skills from empirical personality research in order to fit contemporary scientific expectations better. Alan C. Elms (1994) examined the other side: What can psychobiography do for psychology? Elms named four important aspects: (1) psychobiography can teach psychology how to test the personally significant instead of the statistically significant; (2) with the use of it we can make comparative analyses of an individual case through use of public data; (3) it also helps us to gain new ideas or hypotheses; and (4) it supports our understanding of important single cases. W. T. Schultz (2005c) asserted that studying a case of eminent creativity—beside that it helps us to understand that person better—develops our knowledge about creative process in general and about human mind at its best. And if we learn how creativity contributes mental health, we can utilize this knowledge in a much broader sense.

I believe that the benefits are even more fundamental. Epistemological reflections in qualitative research like psychobiography (Willig, 2008) can illuminate what human psychology is really about (ontological level), and how we gain real, relevant knowledge about it (epistemological level). The method that we choose in our research always has to fit the real nature of our subject, and not to some scientific ideals borrowed from other paradigms (Husserl, 1965/1910–11). After decades of accommodating to biology, psychiatry, neurology and other natural sciences on one hand, and sociology, economics and other social sciences on the other we have to get ready think about “psychology as a rigorous science” on its own, based on its own ontology, epistemology and methodology. Using psychobiography might make us realize what psychology is really about (Yanchar & Hill, 2003).

Teaching psychology students I experience that there is the huge scientific contradiction between the ideas of academic research/education and psychological practice. Students learn a lot about “natural science psychology” (Walsh, Teo, & Baydala, 2014): positivistic empirical research methods and naturalistic theoretical models. When they are about to conduct institutional practice at psychiatry departments, they often realize that dealing with single cases requires a different kind of knowledge: an idiographic, qualitative, contextual and holistic approach called “human science psychology”. Psychobiography as an idiographic, qualitative, contextual and holistic method is really close to “case studies”, so its utilization in education of psychologist would be beneficial. It could fill the gap between research-focused education and practice, and could teach psychology students how to deal with a single case within its contexts. It develops therapeutic skills and attitudes, because understanding a “life” requires empathy and intuition, compelling the psychologist to go beyond the clinical, discovering the existential.

The third dimension I will display in this chapter is psychobiography and its relation to self-knowledge. Wilhelm Dilthey, the father of modern hermeneutics and the philosophical forerunner of psychobiography (Kóvály, 2011) declared that understanding is the discovery of the I in the Thou (Dilthey, 2002/1910). During this

research process the psychologist is getting involved intellectually and emotionally, that is why s/he has to apply personal (and epistemological) reflections (Willig, 2008). Not only to avoid the distorting effects of subjectivity, but to realize that reflected subjectivity is the inherent part of psychological work as a hermeneutic process. So instead of chasing the illusion of objectivity we'd rather develop “educated subjectivity” and construct our “personal knowledge” (Polányi, 2005/1998).

## 6.2 Psychobiography and the Science of Psychology

Psychologists who conduct psychotherapy, counseling or write an expertise are all “psychobiographers” in a way, rather than “natural scientists”. They take different human “products” (behavior, fantasies, dreams, notes, etc.), and within a framework of a special dialogue with the protagonist they interpret the products in order to understand their personal meaning. They have to find interrelations between the psychologically meaningful products, personality dispositions, experiences and life historical events. In the end a structure or a narrative will emerge, integrating the information into meaningful patterns. If we try to clarify, that what kind of knowledge constitutes the basis of psychobiographical research (and similar activities), it might help us to clarify “what psychology is about” (Yanchar & Hill, 2003), especially in real life.

Similar to individual psychotherapy psychobiographical research is focusing on the personal and the unique, and although it might use some general concepts (nomothetic approach), it is rather based on idiographic perspective (Allport, 1961). To unfold the unique pattern of an individual life we have to consider the influence of life-historical, cultural, social, interpersonal and intersubjective contexts. Without these contexts a life will never be understood, neither in psychobiography nor in psychotherapy. In psychobiography we obtain data about the protagonist's behavior and subjective experiences by using—mostly written—first person and third person documents (Allport, 1942). In psychotherapy it is not fully different. For example dream interpretation is an important part of dynamic therapies for ages; but what the therapist is learning about in a session is not the dream, but an oral report about the dream-experience, a text. Ricoeur (1981), who emphasized that, declared that one of the most important consequence of Freud's discoveries is that psychological phenomena that are being interpreted by psychoanalysts (symptoms, dreams, parapraxes, jokes, works of art) are all “language-like”.

So actually (psychobiography) and figuratively (psychotherapy) a psychologist's activity epistemologically is much closer to text-analysis than to natural scientific research. In addition psychological facts are not physical “things” that can be measured, photographed or dissected with the use of natural scientific methods; they are “phenomena” (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012). In mental sciences Karl Jaspers (1997/1913) was the first, who emphasized that psychopathologists in fact use phenomenology when they identify the meaningful units of their patient's behavior and experiences. After that they have to interpret the meaning of these units by putting

them into context and finding their interrelations with other phenomena. The model of this activity is text interpretation; which is conducted under the rules of the hermeneutic tradition. (See Knight, 2019; Mullen, 2019) These rules are the part of every kind of interpretation (Dilthey, 1996/1900); the relevance of this in psychoanalysis and psychology has been discussed for ages (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984).

The epistemological horizon of psychobiographical research (and similar psychological activities) is significantly designated by phenomenology and hermeneutical traditions. When psychologists interpret their patient's behavior and subjective experiences in life historical context they are carrying out phenomenological and hermeneutical activities—no matter if they are aware of it or not. These kind of activities in psychology are based on the application of qualitative and historical-interpretive methods (Runyan, 1997), following the strategy of discovery (Babbie, 2008). It is based on a dialogue: the first person perspective of the protagonist here is equally as important as the third person perspective of the professional, who is aware of the fact that “objectivity” is an illusion. So with the use of epistemological and personal reflections (Willig, 2008) s/he is rather trying to achieve “educated subjectivity”. The most important aim is understanding (*Verstehen*), and not explanation. This “human science psychology” (Walsh et al., 2014) is based on the narrative construct of reality (Bruner, 1986) and the contextualist view of the world and man (Sarbin, 1986). Its meta-theory is not positivism but methodological hermeneutics (Rennie, 2007), and—according to the nature of the subject—existential philosophy can provide a proper ontological base for these researches, (Maslow, 1998/1962).

Mainstream and academic psychologies—dominating the world of research and higher education—are radically different. “Scientific” in here is equal with the application of natural scientific theoretical framework and positivist scientific methods. These psychologies are nomothetic, formulating general laws about personality and behavior. They are not holistic but reductionist, decontextualizing the investigated phenomena. In research—after identifying manipulable “variables”—scientists are using experimental/correlation studies and quantitative methods in order to test hypotheses concerning the supposed interrelations. The aim is “objectivity” at any cost, so the third person perspective (the perspective of the scientific authority) is superior, while the first person perspective is often excluded as unreliable. The goal is explanation, in which scientists often switch to an ontological level that is different from that of the observations. For example the diagnoses of disorders are based on the interpretation of observed behavior and verbal reports, which in fact does not have much to do with natural sciences. But if we take a look at the explanations of disorders in the actual literature, these are often dominated by neurological and neurobiological concepts (Kiehl, 2006). We call this approach “natural science psychology” (Walsh et al., 2014). Natural science psychology is based on paradigmatic/logical scientific construct of reality (Bruner, 1986), mechanistic view of the world and man (Sarbin, 1986), and its meta-theory is logical positivism.

There is a huge contradiction between the way we use psychological knowledge when we approach “real” individuals (in psychobiographical research or in psychotherapy) and the way that we conduct widely accepted empirical/quantitative researches and construct scientific explanations about behavior and mental processes.

Do we suppose that concepts and methods that really fit ontologically and epistemologically the nature and complexity of our subject are not scientific enough? So if we want to be “scientific” in psychology, we must switch to the ontological level of natural sciences? Laing (1990/1953) emphasized that one can approach humans as biological organisms or as persons, which require different concepts, models and methods. But somehow “there is a common illusion” that the science which remains within the realm of the “person” is not scientific and objective enough, so we must translate our observations to “it-processes” using “mechanical or biological analogies” which leads to the objectification of humans (pp. 22–23).

At the end of the 19th century psychology started its struggle for its recognition as a “real” science by adapting hard science methods (Walsh et al., 2014). With this intention psychology implicitly adapted reductionist, naturalistic and mechanic ontological assumptions, and failed to elaborate an ontology that would represent the real nature of human psychological existence (Yanchar & Hill, 2003). Freud for example developed human science approach to clinical phenomena with interpretation, while in theorizing he clung to his positivistic presuppositions (Szummer, 2014). But his mistake was highly influential: in the 1920’ Swiss dynamic psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger rejected Freud’s scientism and began to orient himself towards phenomenology and Heideggerian philosophy (Condrau, 2014). Binswanger and colleague Medard Boss had impact on European mental sciences, and later authors like Raymond McCall (1983) tried to introduce this approach to the American scientific public as well. The “phenomenological contextualism” and “post-Cartesian psychoanalysis” of Stolorow (see his contribution in Foreword) and Atwood (1984, 2019) is also an important contribution to this field. Besides they are related to Henry Murray’s idiographic, qualitative, holistic and life historical trend called personology (Stolorow & Atwood, 2013), that enjoys a welcoming renaissance since the 80s (Alexander, 1990). These trends, along with the success of narrative psychology all supported the current renaissance of psychobiography (Kőváry, 2011).

Psychobiography is a useful research method, which is very close to psychological assessment, expertise writing and even psychotherapy epistemologically. Clarifying its ontological and epistemological background might help us to realize “what psychology is about”. It can support psychology to become a human but rigorous science -not by accommodating to other paradigms but based on its own standards. It also has to influence the way we get future generations prepared for psychological work. In the next subchapter I will examine, how psychobiography could support the university training of psychologists.

### 6.3 Psychobiography and Becoming a Psychologist

During the years of education psychology students learn a lot about “natural science psychology” but very little about “human science psychology”. One can say that according to the widely accepted “scientist-practitioner model” of clinical psychology (Trull & Phares, 2000) it’s not a problem; students become “scientists” during

their university education, while their “practitioner” side will develop during their institutional practice and post-gradual years. But do mental health institutes, the venues for psychologists’ institutional practice grant this development?

21st century psychiatry identifies itself as “biological”, a part of natural sciences and medicine (Buda, 2011). Biological reductionism, medicalization and psychiatrization of psychological problems are the inherent parts of the medical discourse (Foucault, 1994). Relying on the authority of medical sciences psychiatry represents itself as something “more scientific” than (clinical) psychology. Although psychiatry is grounding its scientific authority on referring to hard sciences like neurobiology, in clinical practice a psychiatrist is using this knowledge only in pharmacotherapy. Everything else, the process of diagnosis or supporting the patient psychologically is based on a totally different knowledge, which is in fact not natural scientific (Kóváry, 2018).

During institutional practice psychology students get into a realm intellectually dominated by the medical discourse. Later they have to make case reports for the classroom practice; that’s when they start to realize, that natural science influenced concepts and methods are not too helpful if they try to understand the dynamics of a real person’s problems in life historical context. They can use the medical diagnosis as an organizing principle, and evaluate all the activities of the patient as a symptom of an illness—the same happens in “pathographies”, which is regarded as a bad psychobiography marker (Schultz, 2005a). Medical diagnoses like “bipolar disorder” sometimes have detrimental effect on the process of understanding, because they cut it short by narrowing the horizon of interpretations. Students can also start to identify meaningful phenomena using the data that revealed itself during the interview. After that they can interpret them by finding interrelations between the behavioral units, subjective experiences and life-history events. (Just like in psychobiography). So they have to rely on phenomenology, hermeneutics or structuralism—unreflected and naively, because these were not included in their education. In their interpretations they have to go back to the “old fashioned” ideas of dynamic psychologies; there is no other way to conceptualize these complex phenomena psychologically. The same happens later in therapeutic practice; it is also not based on positivist quantitative research.

Therefore human science psychology, its theories, methods, ontological and epistemological aspects have to get more space in the education of psychologists. Getting students prepared for institutional practice in the classroom we have to emphasize that (1) psychiatric (medical) and psychological/psychotherapeutic diagnoses are different from each other, (2) their activity is going to be directed to the unique and individual (idiographic approach), (3) they are about to understand the structure and meaning of the client’s behavior and subjective experiences in their contexts, so they will have to choose the proper personality and psychopathological theories for interpretation, and the anti-theoretical attitude of empirical researches is not useful in this context, and finally (4) they need to understand the nature of their own activity, so they have to apply epistemological and personal reflections during their work, like in qualitative researches.

The integration of psychobiography could support these necessary changes in education. Although there are very few university trainings (in the US) where psychobiography is the part of the curriculum (Ponterotto et al., 2015), the advantages are so obvious, that the integration worth considering. (1) Psychobiography research forces students to integrate, use and exercise psychological knowledge on a very high level. (2) It supports the emergence and development of “therapeutic wisdom”, which is different from therapy as a “set of techniques”, which the part of scientism in psychotherapy (Stolorow, 2012). (3) Psychobiographical research supports epistemological awareness (as we discussed above). In addition there are no ethical issues in this research process, opposite to clinical case studies. The analysis is based on public data that is available for everyone, and data sources are not limited to the clinical situation. The evaluation of the interpretations are easier and more apparent, because it is not only the report’s author who knows who the protagonist is. Psychobiographies can also compel students to go beyond the clinical/medical dimensions and discover the existential and human. (4) In qualitative researches, says Willig (2008), beside epistemological reflections one always has to make personal reflections as well. Why did I choose this particular subject? What does s/he mean to me? How does my involvement influence the process of my interpretation? In the last subchapter I will focus on the self-knowledge dimension of psychobiographical research, displaying some “psychohistorical” aspects as well.

## 6.4 Freud, Psychobiography and the Necessary Self-analysis

To understand personal involvement and to gain self-knowledge—these are major requirements for psychologists for ages. This topic appeared first as Freud’s famous self-analysis (Anzieu, 1986), followed by the discovery of counter-transference and the introduction of compulsory training analysis (Ferenczi, 1931). These elements shaped the evolution of psychoanalysis and psychology massively. I will focus on Freud’s self-analysis, because it longitudinally contributed the emergence of psychobiography.

As a young scientist Sigmund Freud intended to be a neuropathologist. His boss Ernst Brücke warned him that due to his Jewish origins and the rise of anti-Semitism in Austria he had no chance to achieve academic career. In order to earn enough money for his prospective family Freud started a private practice as a doctor of nervous illnesses (Jones, 1975). He met numerous cases of hysteria, and experienced that regular medical approach wouldn’t help him in understanding and treating his patients. He started experiments with hypnosis, and by 1895 with colleague Josef Breuer they discovered the first “language” of the unconscious, neurotic symptoms. They realized that symptoms have meaning, and by working on the symptoms psychologically they could help the suffering patients to recover (cathartic therapy). This discovery was the first step from neuropathology to depth-psychology. The

consequences took even Freud by surprise; he wrote that—due to the nature of the subject—case histories could be read like short stories. Only the detailed description of mental processes—that was typical in literature, but not in science—helped him to understand the nature of neuroses (Freud, 1955/1893–95).

Although it contributed the emergence of narratology and his interpretive method related him to human sciences, Freud insisted that psychoanalysis was a natural science for life. But it is notable, that in the same year Freud rejected his “Project for Scientific Psychology”, in which he intended to explain psychopathological and psychological phenomena with the use of neurophysiological formulas (Sulloway, 1979). One year before this Dilthey (1977/1894) formulated the differences of “analytic” and “descriptive” psychologies: the former is based on natural sciences and directed to explanation, while the latter is based on human sciences with the aim of understanding (*Verstehen*). Freud’s works of the same year, the “Project” and “Studies on Hysteria” and the rejection of the former are also referring on the incompatibility of these different approaches. As Laing (1990/1953) stated later: it is like the perception of the Rubin-vase, an either/or situation. You can take the other as a biological organism with the use of natural sciences (or “analytic” psychology), or as a person, with the use of existential phenomenology (or “descriptive” psychology).

1895 was only the beginning. In 1896 Freud’s father died, which caused him neurotic symptoms (Jones, 1975). Freud was aware of the fact that neurotic symptoms were coming from unconscious conflicts, which had to be explored in psychoanalytic therapy. Being the only psychoanalyst in the world at that time he couldn’t put himself on the couch, so he had to find another way. In his therapeutic sessions his patients spontaneously began to reflect on their dream contents, made Freud realize that with the use of free associations dreams could be understood similarly to symptoms (Freud, 1957/1914). This led to the discovery of the second language of the unconscious: the visual language of dreams. That dreams are being structured like symptoms later helped Freud to expand his researches from the field of psychopathology to everyday phenomena like parapraxes, jokes, creativity and arts, religion and culture. It also supported him to conduct his famous self-analysis by interpreting his own dreams (Anzieu, 1986). Freud’s personal involvement, his crisis determined the development of psychoanalysis and his own creativity. As countless dream examples in “Interpretation of Dreams” (Freud, 1953/1900) were coming from Freud’s self-analysis, this book in a way is a personal confession in disguise, a testimony that reflects on Freud’s personal struggling journey through his private underworld (the unconscious). Freud’s evolving personal scientific creativity was at least partly the result of the successful elaboration of his own private psychological crisis. Creative urge and personality development are walking hand in hand—as Freud’s disciple Otto Rank (1932) declared it in the subtitle of his famous book “Art and Artist”.

A switch from “natural science” to “human science” also happened in the case of Henry A. Murray, the great American personality psychologists. Murray was a physician, doing research in biochemistry, when in his 30 s he was hit by an “early midlife crisis” (Kóváry, 2019). Three encounters helped him to cope with this crisis, and supported the emergence of his scientific creativity. (“Encounter” is an important aspect in the development of creativity, see May, 1959). In this dark



period Murray met Christiana Morgan, a young woman who had been the patient of Carl Gustav Jung before. Morgan introduced depth-psychology to Murray, who later made friends with Jung, and got involved in the psychobiography of Henry Melville for life. He went on becoming a school founder personality psychologist establishing personology, which is about the in-depth exploration of single cases. He constructed the world famous Thematic Apperception Test together with Morgan (Anderson, 1988). Their collaboration made Murray formulating the idea of “dyadic creativity” (Murray, 1959), an important forerunner of intersubjective approach in psychology. Like Freud, Murray solved his personal crisis by elaborating it creatively: he founded a psychological trend which is idiographic, dynamic and life-historical. Similar to Freud, Murray remained faithful to his original scientific roots by emphasizing the importance of biological motivation forces he called “needs” (Kőváry, 2019).

Some might say that it’s ok, but not generalizable. But generalizability is natural science psychology’s criterion; human science psychology rather tends to understand the particular in real life context. According to Dilthey (1989/1883) in human sciences if we manage to identify a meaningful structure in a significant case, we can draw conclusions from the particular to the particular. If a structure element appears in another case, it is likely that the other parts of the structure will appear too. It also happens in clinical work. When we talk about clinical single cases in group supervisions, we often do the same, saying: “Oh, once I had a similar case...”. We tend to believe that it is illuminating, a proper way to interpret and understand an actual clinical situation. In psychobiography the idea of “multiple case psychobiography” (Isaacson, 2005) represents the same approach.

So dreams opened the door for Freud to understand everyday phenomena like slips of the tongue (Freud, 1960/1901), and as they sometimes make us laugh, he began to investigate humor as well. “Jokes and Their Relation to Unconscious” (1960/1905) was the first psychoanalytic work about aesthetics, because jokes belong to comedy as a literary genre. Freud emphasized that jokes—similar to therapy—can cause catharsis because of their content, but a special language formation is always necessary for that. It is about the transformation of unconscious material by joke-work, similarly to dream-work executed by primary processes of the unconscious mind. As jokes belong to the realm of aesthetics, it obviously led to discovering the “language of the arts” in the following years (Kőváry, 2017). Freud realized that the investigated psychological phenomena (symptoms, dreams, parapraxes, jokes, works of art) are all related to unconscious fantasies. It is always necessary to transform the original fantasy material by the mentioned primary processes in order to bypass egos’s censorship, making wish-fulfillment and enjoyment possible. In the case of artistic creative transformation—analogue to dream-work and joke-work—Kris (2000/1952) later formulated the concept of “art-work”, a psychoanalytic expression that describes the creative process. So fifteen years after rejecting “Project”, in 1910 Freud arrived to the investigation of artistic creativity in life historical context, creating the epoch-making “Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood” (Freud, 1957/1910).

“Leonardo” is the first ever written psychobiography and the first systematic psychological analysis of an outstanding creative person (Kőváry, 2017). Besides Freud also introduced some new ideas in this writing that later became highly important in

psychoanalysis and psychology. He introduced the concept of narcissism, which he discussed in details only some years later, and according to Blum (2001) the father of psychoanalysis also anticipated the idea of early object relations approach in this essay. Blum also emphasizes that the “Leonardo” was a chance for Freud to expand psychoanalytic research (which is related to the development of his scientific creativity), and according to his personal involvement, the process of interpretation was also an eventuality for him to carry on constructing his own self.

This personal involvement is particularly important; it is well-known that Freud identified himself with Leonardo (Jones, 1975). So his interpretation of Leonardo’s personality and creativity was at least partly an indirect self-analysis, the continuation of the process that Freud had started formerly due to the death of his father leading to the birth of “Interpretation of Dreams”. Critics like the Wittkower and Wittkower (1963) or Elms (2005) refer to indirect self-analysis as a scientific mistake, but from the perspective of human science psychology (based on phenomenology and hermeneutics) subjectivity is inevitable, an inherent part of the process. Quoting Dilthey again: “understanding is the discovery of the I in the Thou” (2002/1910). Dilthey identified this process as “losing ourselves in a strange existence”; he believed that this is the only way to achieve deep “historical” insights.

It means that the creative process of writing a psychobiography is preceded by a period of reception/inspiration, which has its own dynamics. We are receiving the life histories and life-works of our protagonists, re-experiencing their original impressions. This reception or influence is always containing interpretations; according to Norman Holland (1976) this process is based on “countertransference” and (mostly indirect) self-analysis. First we have expectations, anticipations. After that we select the material partly unconsciously, according to our dispositions and fantasies, and this selection always has self-defensive aspects. Following that we project our desires onto the selected material (the phase of fantasy), and in the end we transform the emerging fantasies into meaningful and sharable themes.

So the received and interpreted material—that later will take the form of a product, for example a psychobiography—always contains self-analytic aspects. This process includes “regressive” elements (according to psychoanalysis) that can be described with different concepts like identification (Freud, 1964/1932), from the perspective of ego-psychology and object relations theory it’s a symbiotic re-fusion with the object (Mitchell & Black, 1995), we also lose ourselves in a strange existence (Dilthey, 2002/1910) or experience “participation mystique” (Levy-Brühl, quoted by Jung, 1928). In the cases of mental problems regression is a malevolent phenomenon that leads to the disintegration of the self, but this kind of regression is standing the service of the ego (Kris, 2000/1952). This regression as inspiration is followed by the phase of elaboration: we create artistic/scientific products and also ourselves. The starting point of this process is never accidental; according to Hungarian psychoanalyst Imre Hermann (2007/1930) the emergence of creativity (beside talent and motivation) always depends on external “causing forces”. Causing forces can be traumas, conflicts, crises, limit situations (Jaspers, 1970), prototypical scenes (Schultz, 2005b), encounters with reality and others (May, 1959) or peak experiences (Maslow, 1998/1962). According to Maslow these latter are always “acute identity

experiences”, affecting not only creative activity but also the (re)formation of the self.

The structure and the dynamics of the creative process are very similar to dream formation, and their function is also comparable. In dreaming the unconscious is selecting some daily residues from the hundreds of everyday experiences that are ready to bear the projection of wishes, fears, conflicts that are partly coming from the past. Primary processes (condensation, replacement, symbolism, representation) transform these impressions into dream-products, which represent our deepest unconscious wishes and conflicts. But according to Freud (1953/1900) it always happens in disguise, as a compromise formation, and if dream-work is successful, dream contents will be in an “optimal aesthetic distance” (Scheff, 1979) from the self that helps us to bear and handle the emotional experiences they represent. “Art-work” (Kris, 2000/1952), the creative process is similar: it helps the creator to rearrange sometimes traumatic experiences, placing them into an “optimal aesthetic distance”, to make them easier to bear. Unsuccessful dream-work causes nightmares, while unsuccessful art-work might cause re-traumatization. Rachel Rosenblum (2012) analyzed fatal cases of artists when the “optimal distance” collapsed. She referred to several traumatized authors (like Holocaust-survivors), who, after the years of writing hetero-biographies as elaboration of their traumas, turned to autobiography, and later committed suicide. It seems that the lack of distance finally left the self unprotected, and caused re-traumatization and the annihilation of the self.

According to Holland’s model a member of the audience can bring off a similar but also indirect self-analysis by receiving and consuming works of art. Writing psychobiographies contains both sides: the phase of reception (inspiration) and the phase of creation (elaboration), which always contains personal aspects. As Erik Erikson wrote in his “Luther” (1993/1958):

the clinical biographer [might] feel that he is dealing with a patient. If the clinician should indulge himself into this feeling, however, he will soon find out that the imaginary client has been dealing with him.... (p. 16)

He also emphasized that during this work the interpreter has to make reflections about the personal sources of his/her interest towards the protagonist (Erikson, 1968). Psychobiographical research therefore not only facilitates the integration of psychological knowledge on the highest level, not only helps psychology students to develop “therapeutic” skills and existential understanding that are both important in conducting individual therapies later. Writing psychobiographies also supports the emerging self awareness of the author, as knowing the other and knowing the self are walking hand in hand and facilitate each other mutually during this process.

## 6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I wanted to denote three interrelating aspects of psychobiographical research. More than two decades ago a modern classic of psychobiography, Elms

(1994) has already started to collect the arguments why psychology should start to take psychobiography seriously. I went further, and declared that the ontological and epistemological consequences of psychobiography research might help us to clarify what psychology is really about, and it would be beneficial if this clarification started during university education. Beside this the integration of psychobiography into the curriculum of psychology students would have several other beneficial effects. One of these is the support of self-knowledge, which is related to the fact that the researcher (and the similarly, the therapist) is getting emotionally involved while focusing on the significant other. The final part of my chapter is about placing this phenomenon into historical and theoretical context to unfold its importance not only for psychobiography but also for psychology in general. The major aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how important it would be to include human science psychology into the training of psychologists, and how psychobiography could serve as a fine tool in this mission.

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