

Alfred Adler's Successor

Adele K. Davidson, Editor

The Collected Works of Lydia Sicher: An Adlerian Perspective

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Review by

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Viewing people as a form of motion, Lydia Sicher asked clients, "Whither are you rolling?" (Davidson, 1991, p. 130). In her work as a theoretician and clinician, Sicher always concentrated on the way people move, the direction of their movement, and the endpoint they seek. This perspective enabled her both to recognize the goals that pattern a client's life and to understand the client's methods for pursuing these goals in the home, at work, and in the community. Adhering to Adler's principle idea, Sicher insisted that deficits in social interest cause distortion in life patterns and discouragement in life styles. She steadfastly asserted that improvement of a life style and completion of a life pattern depend upon increasing a client's social interest or communal feeling. A heightened sense of belongingness empowers the individual to connect with the community by cooperating, creating, and contributing.

In assembling Sicher's lectures and articles, editor Adele Davidson seeks to contribute to a revival of classical Individual Psychology, the way Adler and Sicher practiced it. Sicher remained "absolutely faithful" to the letter and spirit of Adler's theory and viewed herself as a "classical Adlerian." Sicher and her colleagues have been dismayed by the way in which some American Adlerians simplified and systematized the theory and practice of Individual Psychology. This book invites contemporary Adlerians to return to

their roots by re-reading Adler's books and reading, for the first time, the seminal works of Lydia Sicher, Adler's most trusted disciple. More immediately, Davidson aims to revive Sicher's hallowed name in psychodynamic psychology, at least in the circle of contemporary Adlerians who seem unaware of Sicher's pivotal role in their own history. For other readers, this collection of Sicher's articles and lectures provides a fascinating glimpse at how Individual Psychology was rendered during the middle of the twentieth century.

Davidson's biographical sketch of Sicher (1890-1962) represents one of the book's major contributions. In 1916, Sicher earned an M.D. from the University of Vienna and was commissioned as a first lieutenant practicing internal medicine in the Austrian army during World War I. After the armistice, she returned to the University of Vienna and completed a Ph.D. in zoology in 1922, following which she worked for six years in the University's Department of Psychiatry. During this period, Adler trained her to take his place in Vienna. When Adler moved to the United States in 1929, he appointed Sicher to succeed him as Head of the Viennese Society of Individual Psychology and Director of the Clinic for Nervous Diseases which Adler had founded. Sicher herself left Vienna in 1938, spending a year in England before settling in the United States. For the next two years, she worked as a consulting psychologist for the Family Service Society in Salt Lake City and lectured on social work for the University of Utah. In 1941 she moved her practice to Los Angeles and in 1948 founded that city's Institute for Individual Psychology, which eventually closed in 1990.

Two types of materials follow the biographical sketch: edited transcripts culled from 100 hours of taped lectures and classes during eleven years (1950-1961) and a selection of journal articles published by Sicher

between 1933 and 1958. Davidson skillfully weaves this diverse material into seven major sections dealing with social interest, life style, family constellation, education of children, responsibility, war disturbances, and discouragement. Addenda include a series of recollections of Slicher written by prominent Adlerians, the transcript of a radio program from 1961, Slicher's complete bibliography, and the obituary Slicher delivered for Adler in 1937.

Although the audience for this book will probably be almost exclusively Adlerian psychologists and educators, a wider audience would appreciate two of Slicher's more influential essays. In her most renowned article, "Education for Freedom," Slicher asserts that people need love more than power and understanding more than information. Educated people must know more than facts that help them succeed in occupations. They need to understand the importance of the community and how to actively participate in the give-and-take of everyday life. The second article deals with a core topic in Individual Psychology, the psychological significance of birth order. Writing about "The Family Constellation in the Old Testament," Slicher uses individuals described in the Bible to exemplify the interpersonal repertoire and intrapersonal attributes that characterize only, oldest, second-born, and youngest children. These two articles, and the book as a whole, certainly affirm the homage offered to Lydia Slicher by those who regard her as Adler's successor in Vienna and scion in the United States.

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