

*ДИСКУССИИ И ДИСКУРСЫ*  
*DISCUSSIONS AND DISCOURSES*

# Personality Syndromes in the Light of the Historical Crisis in Psychology, a Cultural-Historical Activity Theory Position

**Mohamad El Maouch**

Zhengzhou Normal University, Zhengzhou, China  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0376-9280>, e-mail: [elmaouch.m@zznu.edu.cn](mailto:elmaouch.m@zznu.edu.cn)

**Zheng Jin**

Zhengzhou Normal University, Zhengzhou, China; University of California, Davis, Davis, CA, United States  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3191-4473>, e-mail: [jinzheng@zznu.edu.cn](mailto:jinzheng@zznu.edu.cn)

**Yiming Shi**

Zhengzhou Normal University, Zhengzhou, China  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5279-7924>, e-mail: [sym1669@163.com](mailto:sym1669@163.com)

Following the cultural-historical activity theory guidelines, this study investigates the potential consistency between scientific methodologies and personality syndromes. By minding not falling into rough simplification and misleading generalization, our methodological assumption suggests a line of historical similarity worthy of being investigated deeply in future studies. The study looks into the consistency in the historical development of the methodologies representing ‘the symptoms’ of psychology as a science living through its historical crisis, on one hand, and the personality syndromes representing the ‘implicit methodologies’ of individuals, on the other. Such an approach allows one to draw more on personality syndromes, their taxonomy, and their root, in addition to the potential predictions of their destiny. A crucial methodological consideration that allows such dependency is that science is a special form (highly abstract and generalized) of creative activity sharing a similar nature to the daily ordinary creative activity of personality. So, science might represent an early historically elaborated version of the ordinary-daily form of activity structure, which allows us to hypothesize that personality syndromes, in their own characteristics, might share the developmental tendency of the noted methodologies rooted in the subjective-objective epistemological rupture as a ground of the historical crisis.

**Keywords:** psychology, crisis, methodology, personality syndromes, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT).

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# Синдромы личности в свете исторического кризиса в психологии, позиция культурно-исторической теории деятельности

**Э. Мохамад**

Чжэнчжоуский университет, Чжэнчжоу, Китай  
ORCID: 0000-0003-0376-9280, e-mail: elmaouch.m@zznu.edu.cn

**З. Цзинь**

Чжэнчжоуский университет, Чжэнчжоу, Китай; Калифорнийский университет,  
Дэвис, Калифорния, США  
ORCID:0000-0003-3191-4473, e-mail: jinzheng@zznu.edu.cn

**Yiming Shi**

Чжэнчжоуский университет, Чжэнчжоу, Китай  
ORCID: 0009-0009-5279-7924, e-mail: sym1669@163.com

Следуя принципам культурно-исторической теории деятельности, данное исследование изучает потенциальное соответствие между научными методологиями и синдромами личности. Не впадая в упрощение и ошибочное обобщение, наше методологическое предположение состоит в том, что существует некая линия исторического сходства, которая должна быть глубоко изучена в будущих исследованиях. В данной статье рассматривается последовательность исторического развития методологий, представляющих «симптомы» психологии как науки, переживающей свой исторический кризис, с одной стороны, и синдромы личности, представляющие «имплицитные методологии» индивидов, с другой. Такой подход позволяет больше узнать о синдромах личности, их таксономии и корнях, а также сделать прогнозы на будущее. Важнейшим методологическим соображением, допускающим такую зависимость, является то, что наука — это особая, высокоабстрактная и обобщенная форма творческой деятельности, имеющая сходную природу с повседневной творческой деятельностью личности. Таким образом, наука может представлять собой раннюю исторически проработанную версию структуры обыденно-повседневной формы деятельности, что позволяет предположить, что синдромы личности могут иметь ту же тенденцию развития отмеченных методологий, берущую свое начало в субъективно-объективном эпистемологическом разрыве как основании исторического кризиса.

**Ключевые слова:** психология, кризис, методология, синдромы личности, культурно-историческая теория деятельности (КИТ).

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## Introduction

In his book “The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book About a Vast Memory,” Luria states that “psychology has yet to become a science that is capable of dealing with the really vital aspects of human personality...the development of such a psychology is a job for the future” [29, p.159], by defining how these syndromes are socio-historically formed is “one important method in the approaches used” [29, p. 160]. However, mainstream psychology drowned deeper in empiricism, fragmentation, and eclecticism, under the historical crisis of psychology [46] that is neglected and remained under-referenced [10; 21], hence, tearing down psychology foundations

and threatening its coherence, leading it to be *markedly heterogeneous, and* witnessing a critical situation along with the entrenchment of realist ontology, quantitative methods, positivist epistemology, and the absence of an axiological frame (see [6; 17; 38; 44]) in addition to the lack of “knowledge of theory, theory methodology, and theory needs with respect to changing from a disunified to unified science” [41, p. 3], which transformed psychology into a mystical and depsychologized domain under two tendencies simultaneously (the naturalistic and the idealistic) governed by its epistemological and methodological crisis [10]. These symptoms as an “extreme expression of solipsism and idealism in psychology” [46, p. 259], along with the lack of a unified definition of the

object of study, appears also in personality studies (see [7]), same as in artificial intelligence as an applied field of psychology that inherited the crisis [10]. The previous condition “increased the significance of the work [Vygotsky’s work]” [46, p. vii].

The noted context is crucial in how can the evaluation of scientific methodologies (and their origin) aid our investigation in personality research because it provides us with a general historical tendency of personality structure, and *personality syndromes, derived from neuropsychological syndromes*, coined by Luria [51].

However, in this paper, we will limit ourselves to laying down the methodological guidelines that allow such a similarity, and in later work, we will apply these guidelines to investigate the mainstream taxonomies of personality disorder.

In the rest of the paper, our leading hypothesis is that the *symptoms of the crisis (represented in methodologies)* that we witnessed in psychology, have a potentially similar version in the field of personality study in the form of well-elaborated syndromes under the statement: *a methodology is the implicit personality of science, while personality is the implicit methodology of the individual.*

In doing so, our methodological propositions are one, both the scientific activity and the daily-ordinary activity are two forms of creative activity. However, since scientific activity (realized in methodologies) is a *special* highly abstract creative activity (like art), therefore, it forms an early (historical) well-elaborated version of the *daily* activity (condensed in individual personality) due to that science is required to be self-aware by defining its tools explicitly: “first, science accepts as a principle that its every step has a critical basis” [19, p.56]. The second methodological proposition is that since psychology (as our domain of science) looks into the individual (especially personality) as a main object of study, the outcome of psychological schools’ investigation is an abstract form of that individual. It is about individuals’ motivations, goals, origins of consciousness, normality, and pathology, and more importantly, psychology studies the interaction of individual and environment, etc... In general, psychology is the human abstracted (defined) in the language of science. By building on the previous two methodological propositions, the third methodological proposition is that both psychology and personality are the representation of the worldview embedded in the mainstream ideology that shapes the epistemological starting point of science and daily activity. Fourth, the *pathological* history of psychology is a potential source of understanding the pathology in personality. By that, we are not pathologizing science, but it is a metaphor to describe the crisis as a disturbance in achieving functionality about revealing the reality’s movement and laws, both in science and daily activity. In the later paragraphs, we will expand on these methodological propositions.

### About *special* and *daily-ordinary* creativity

In brief, the first methodological proposition is that all human creative activities both special (art and science) and daily/ordinary, as part of the activity system,

share a mutual root of being contradictions-based functions to adapt by grasping and controlling the objective context through facing and overcoming perturbations with the goal of transforming reality, or being through becoming hence, the meanings that form the fabric of consciousness emerge (as a new quality) representing the abstraction of functional internal content (hence, allows generalization) of phenomena, that is crucial for creativity (e.g., see [10; 11; 12; 28]).

So, all the forms of mental activity are creative, both on the ordinary-daily and special levels “aimed at producing ‘alternative worlds’” [14; p.95]. The only difference is in the degree governed by the components of the contradictions (see, [12]).

The similarity between special and daily forms of creative activity is at the functional and structural levels. For instance, science is a “general labor” [see, 14]. Moreover, in Vygotsky’s theory of art, “aesthetics is a matter of delayed action...a vague great feeling of wanting to act and react... [and an] organization of our future behavior” [28, p. 247–8], and holding a transformative function in reality similarly to daily-ordinary life activities [e.g., 12; 28; 31].

### Methodologies and personalities as instruments in different activity systems

The second methodological proposition is that psychology, as a science about the individual (and personality), and the individual personality, they both share a similar object of activity. The first (psychology) handles its own topic in scientific language, while the second (the individual) handles it relatively in the *folk psychology’s* language of daily consciousness since the daily conditions rarely allow the general population to reach a high level of abstract thought [see 45]. So, since both share a similar *object* of activity, i.e., mastering the truth about personality and mastering the personality itself [see 45, p. 342], the *tool* of this activity should share a similar aspect as well. For CHAT, the object of activity requires the usage of one instrument (a tool) and not the other. For Leontiev, “the instrument is the first real abstraction” [26, p. 23] about the object itself in the context of transforming that object. Indeed, in science, the definition of methodology is “a body of methods, rules, and postulates employed by a discipline: a particular procedure or set of procedures” (see [80]), and “a system of ways of doing, teaching, or studying something” (see [4]). Methodology “refers to the diverse principles, procedures, and practices that govern empirical research” [23, p.3]. It is “the approach in which research troubles are solved thoroughly. It is the science of studying how research is conducted systematically. In this field, the researcher explains himself with the different steps generally taken to study a research problem. Hence, the scientific approach which is adopted for conducting a research is called methodology” [34, p.1].

In turn, Vygotsky considers the methodology as the representation of the objective movement of reality. He states:

*“we must immediately accept that reality determines our experience, the object of science and its method and*

that it is entirely impossible to study the concepts of any science independent of the realities it represents. Engels [1925/1978, p. 514] has pointed out many times that for dialectical logic the methodology of science is a reflection of the methodology of reality. He says that 'the classification of sciences of which each analyzes a different form of movement, or a number of movements that are connected and merge into each other, is at the same time a classification, an ordering according to the inherent order of these forms of movement themselves and in this resides their importance'" [46, p. 255].

On the other hand, "The personality of a man is in no sense preexisting in relation to his activity; just as with his consciousness, activity gives rise to personality" [26, p. 105].

Therefore, the self is the crystallized product of the activity processes (the practice) embedding the "logic of functioning and developing of human practical purposeful activity" [42, p. 484.], and directed to handle objects and *reality testing* (see [46] for *object relations theory* about personality). CHAT considers "the constant flow of activity as the source of mind and self" [42, p. 484]. On the other hand, the self has the role of being an orienting and regulating element, this is the functional response under the requirement of social context (e.g., see [26; 30]). It is the "embodiment of a *meaningful life project...* that reflects and also organizes the most significant aspects of one's life" [42, p. 494].

Personality is "the regulation of the self and its relationships to internal and external objects" [93, p. 199]. So, both methodologies and personality are tools formed by *the object* of the activity as *ways of doing* and *interpreting* (see [26; 42]).

### Worldview both in psychology and personality

In addition to being both forms of *creative* activity, having the functional role of an *instrument/tool*, and having a mutual *object* of activity, the third methodological proposition is that both methodology and personality, in practice, represent a worldview, an epistemology. For instance, "science is philosophical down to its ultimate elements. It is permeated, so to speak, by methodology" [46, p. 293]. Also, although a worldview (ideology) in science is usually hidden, it represents the sociohistorical laws affecting science from within. However, sometimes the worldview reveals itself when the scientific idea

*"developed to its logical extremes, carried out to its ultimate conclusion, generalized as possible... show its real face... it is actually only now, reduced to a philosophical form, apparently obscured by many later developments ... that the idea reveals what it wants, what it is, from which social tendencies it arose, which class interests it serves. Only having developed into a world view or having become attached to it, does the particular idea change from a scientific fact into a fact of social life again... it reveal its social nature... but was hidden under the mask of the neutral scientific fact it impersonated"* [46, p. 242–3].

The aforementioned represents why the mainstream methodologies that represent and conserve the epistemo-

logical rupture, i.e., the subjective-objective, and idealist-materialist, are the *symptoms* of the crisis, reflecting, in the final analysis, the social rupture between the mind and the reality due to the conservative nature of the mainstream mind trying to conserve the dominant social relationships of production [6]. Additionally, Vygotsky notes that "such antipodes [idealist-naturalist] ... do not merely contradict each other, but necessarily presuppose each other's existence ... with a coincidence of the basic assumptions, starting-points and philosophical premises of dualistic idealism" [46, p. 259–260]. So, "for science as a social function reflects at present the contradictions with society" [19, p. 57] characterized by "the separation of theory and action... [as] a historical phenomenon" [19, p.53] which reveals the dependency of mastering "the truth about personality and personality itself" and mastering "the truth about society and society itself" [46, p. 342]. Furthermore, epistemology is embedded in worldview and culture that have an impact on behavior and personality formation (e.g., [2; 5; 49]), as a version of the *narrative*, including moral values and identity [20; 27]. The mainstream worldview, both in science and daily activity, reflects a rupture between the sense-making subjective space (the interpreting space of the thinking component of the mind, i.e., the *I*), and the objective meanings space (the material that requires interpreting, i.e., the *self*-related meanings) explained mainly by Vygotsky and Leontiev [see 11]. In science, it leads to what Paul Komesaroff calls *the objectivity crisis* in the age of the crisis of science, hence, threatening the epistemological commitment of science "that science no longer answers the important questions of the times [see 24, p. 371], turning "its back on the causes of the social crisis and even downgraded the means of investigating it" [19, p. 56].

On the level of the individual, the noted rupture could lead to a psychological catastrophe [see 11] when:

*"in given circumstances, the lack of correspondence of sense and meaning in individual consciousness may take on the character of a real alienation between them, even their opposition... and then they begin to live as if in someone else's garments. It is necessary to imagine the major contradiction that gives rise to this phenomenon. This makes it possible to introduce into the individual's consciousness and impose on him distorted or fantastic representations and ideas, including such as have no basis in his real practical life experience... in itself it creates only a devastation capable of turning into a psychological catastrophe"* [26, p. 91, 93 015194].

Indeed, the problem and dichotomy of the unconscious (meanings space)-conscious (senses-making space) "is of decisive methodological importance ... [and] fundamental for our science, and its very fate depends on the way it is solved" [47, p. 110]. Overall, the epistemological rupture, as a worldview, appears both in psychological science and personality.

### Pathology as the Key to Normality

The fourth methodological proposition is that since the crisis in psychology is a well-elaborated and highly abstract version of the crisis in creative activity since



psychology is the abstract explicit definition of the individual elevated into epistemological and methodological language, it provides general aspects of the pathology of the daily-ordinary creative activity. Methodologies in psychology are an abstract form of personality syndromes. It is the methodological principle of the “reverse” method noted by Marx when the mature phenomenon (methodologies in our case) is the key to understanding the lower one (personality syndromes).

“A certain stage of development and the process itself can only be fully understood when we know the endpoint of the process, the result, the direction it took, and the form into which the given process developed... Having arrived at the end of the path we can more easily understand the whole path in its entirety” [46, p. 235].

Also, “the essence and nature of the phenomena studied by psychology can be revealed in their purest form in the extreme, pathological form... The key to psychology is in pathology” [46, p. 234]. So, an early highly-elaborated and abstract version of *special pathology* (in the *special* form of creative activity) might assist in understanding the *ordinary pathology* (in the *daily-ordinary* form of creative activity), which might be an answer to the question about when: “personality pathology take its lead from dimensions of normal personality?” [8, p. 26]! Vygotsky did not draw such a similarity between the methodological crisis and personality syndromes. Instead, we borrow from Vygotsky his methodological assumption that in pathology lies the key to understanding *normality*, hence, we do not consider personality syndromes as the exact copy of scientific crisis’ symptoms (its methodologies), but only to grasp their similar developmental tendencies and internal laws.

### Methodologies as Symptoms and Personality Syndromes

Another shared aspect between methodologies and personality syndromes is *consistency*. Methodologies have a *consistent* nature. For instance, we have the positivist, phenomenological, introspective, etc... These represent consistent ways of *behavior* in science. On another hand, Behavioral Syndromes, as defined in pieces of literature, “behave in a consistent way through time or across contexts and is analogous to ‘personality’ or ‘temperament’” [3, p. 755], and are also conceptualized as behavioral type [22]. Additionally, “a person’s personality typically stays the same over time... Personality disorders are long-term patterns of behavior” [1]. According to the mainstream taxonomy, one can find “10 specific types of personality disorders in the DSM-5-TR” and “they affect at least two of these areas: Way of thinking about oneself and others; Way of responding emotionally; Way of relating to other people; Way of controlling one’s behavior” [1]. Another taxonomy, in alternative DSM-5 (AMPD), considers 5 specific types [see, 20].

Still, this consistency is only relative over time. As noted in the **Introduction**, recently in psychology, there is a lack of methodological theory, absence of an axiological frame, heterogeneity, and eclecticism (multi-

tude of methodological guidelines accepted at the same time), hence, “*threatening the coherence of psychology and watering down the foundation of scientific rationality*” [10, p. 4], representing that methodologies’ consistency is shackled. On another hand, in the past decades, the personality has witnessed such a threat to coherence. Schizophrenia cases witnessed a significant increase (see [13]). This number is only according to the official record due to the low compilation of mental health statistics [13], and due to the that personality disorders (PDs) are under-recognizing in clinical practice and “not included within the policy-informing initiatives scope [50, p. 26].

Furthermore, similar to methodologies that are continuously proliferating, with no stable categorization, but developing on the continuum between the two poles of the epistemological rupture, PDs also in continuous development. These *disorders have dimensional constructs with no qualitative distinct nature*, and “can be located on a continuum” making their *separate constructs* taxonomy, e.g., in DSM-5, “has serious limitations... [and] may not be valid ... and deemed insufficient” [20, p.1]. Another aspect of PDs is the *impairment* level of personality functioning, which goes along with the *fragmentation* in methodologies. Thus, both are on a continuum and represent impairment [20], which goes with CHAT’s analysis that the malfunction of the self is noted in sections Methodologies and personalities as instruments in different activity systems and Worldview both in psychology and personality [see 11]).

According to some literature [see 20], the methodological tool for investigating PDs is under debate. So, the proposed methodological position in this paper might contribute to the theoretical expansion of the taxonomy of PDs and their causal development. In a word, we say in advance that the development of PDs is also governed by the similar tension between the two poles (the idealist and the naturalistic) of the epistemological rupture governing the development of mainstream methodologies in psychology. An example is the *asceticism-consumerism personality* (e.g., see [16; 37; 39]). *Asceticism*, by neglecting (withdrawing from) the environmental temptations, represents the idealist pole in methodology, while the other pole, i.e., *consumerism* characterized by *accumulation and consumption of material resources* [18], represents what Alberto Moravia named as the state of the *worm man* [35], is similar to the empiricist, positivist, and the pure sensualist quantitative methodologies following the formula “all we needed was more of the same” [9, p. 86]. A recent version of this tension is condensed in the individual-society rupture, due to the individualistic ideology of postmodernity that promotes disintegration, contrasting rationality, and the nihilistic negation of meanings and *truth*. It is the crisis of the individualistic project, and the disintegration of its narrative, goals, etc., leading to misery, and inauthenticity resulting in schizophrenia as a disturbance of real activity (see [13; 52]). It is the general *crisis of the mind* in modern times [12]. Due to the crisis, if the “wasteful dispersal of intellectual energies... has characterized the course of science over the last century” [19, p. 57], in the individual case, is the catastrophe in the psycho-mental

plane (see section: World view both in psychology and personality). Also, similar to mainstream methodologies when the idealist pole recalls and asks for the empiricist pole [46], in personality syndromes as well, more tension in the self-centered narcissistic pole recalls more tension in the consumerist one [40]. Thus, the current state both in science and personality and due to the crisis in the social mainstream project is “when relationships have so far developed and conflicts of interest have reached such an intensity that even the average eye can penetrate beyond appearances to what is really going on” [19, p. 55], hence, forcing both science and personality to announce the mainstream worldview that conserves the rupture, even it will lead to the disintegration of the structure of activity and mid itself.

### Conclusion

Regarding the question in personality studies about “Which content area and its organizing principles—the interpersonal, behavioral, cognitive, existential, biophysical, or psychodynamic — is most fundamental?” [50, p.26], this study proposes a functional historical-comparative methodology in investigating the development and tendency of personality syndromes and their

classification through the investigation of the methodologies in psychological science. By considering that both methodology and personality share a similar functionality as a tool and a similar object of activity, i.e., individual, embedding the mainstream worldview and epistemic standpoints, the paper suggests that both representing the outcome of a crisis in their domain, under the general crisis of creative activity [12], with the pathology in abstract activity (science) provides a mature and elaborated version of what less abstract activity (daily-ordinary) might become. It is not an attempt to pathologize science but to discover the historical tendencies in several activity systems when the highly abstract ones (as in science) could assist us and inform us about how the schema of ordinary-daily ones might develop. Overall, methodologies as symptoms of the crisis in science and personality syndromes as the symptoms of the crisis in individual-society interaction and considered rooted in the epistemological rupture and due to the tension between two poles of the rupture, i.e., the pure idealist and the pure naturalistic. Moreover, due to the lack of space, an extensive investigation into which personality syndromes are similar to which methodologies will be a topic for another study. Again, our concluding statement is: *a methodology is the implicit personality of science, while personality is the implicit methodology of the individual.*

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**Information about the authors**

*Mohamad El Maouch*, PhD in Psychology, Research Fellow, Henan International Joint Laboratory of Psychological Data Science, Zhengzhou Normal University, Zhengzhou, China, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0376-9280>, e-mail: [elmaouch.m@zznu.edu.cn](mailto:elmaouch.m@zznu.edu.cn)

*Zheng Jin*, PhD in Human Factors, Professor and the Director of Henan International Joint Laboratory of Psychological Data Science, Zhengzhou Normal University, Zhengzhou, China; and Collaborative Researcher, Department of Psychology, University of California, Davis, CA, United States, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3191-4473>, e-mail: [jinzheng@zznu.edu.cn](mailto:jinzheng@zznu.edu.cn)

*Yiming Shi*, Henan International Joint Laboratory of Psychological Data Science, Zhengzhou Normal University, Zhengzhou, China. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5279-7924>, e-mail: [sym1669@163.com](mailto:sym1669@163.com)

**Информация об авторах**

*Мохамад Эль Мауч*, кандидат психологических наук, научный сотрудник, Хэнаньская международная объединенная лаборатория психологической науки о данных, Чжэнчжоуский университет, Чжэнчжоу, Китай. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0376-9280>, e-mail: [elmaouch.m@zznu.edu.cn](mailto:elmaouch.m@zznu.edu.cn)

*Чжэн Цзинь*, кандидат психологических наук, профессор, руководитель Хэнаньской международной объединенной лабораторией психологической науки о данных, Чжэнчжоуский университет, Чжэнчжоу, Китай. Факультет психологии, Калифорнийский университет, Дэвис, Калифорния, США, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3191-4473>, e-mail: [jinzheng@zznu.edu.cn](mailto:jinzheng@zznu.edu.cn)

*Имин Ши*, Хэнаньская международная объединенная лаборатория психологической науки о данных, Чжэнчжоуский университет, Чжэнчжоу, Китай. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5279-7924>, e-mail: [sym1669@163.com](mailto:sym1669@163.com)

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