

PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO PRACTICE PSYCHOTHERAPY IN VENEZUELA

Maria J. Bustamante
Universidad Católica Andres Bello
Venezuela

Most psychologists who practice psychotherapy in Venezuela are "Licenciados," with a certificate of a graduate internship in clinical psychology, which may have lasted from two to three years. They describe themselves as Clinical Psychologists. There are a couple of psychoanalysts who were trained in Chile or Argentina, and a few who have had doctoral training in the U.S.A.; most of these are in private practice.

There is no state board certification or licensing as such. There have been several attempts to pass in Congress a "Law of the practice of Psychology" which have failed due to various political reasons. A word about the Venezuelan educational system is in order here. It is very similar to the French system. Upon entering college, the student goes directly into his chosen field. After five years with quite a comprehensive and broad program of studies he can obtain the degree of "Licenciado," which in fact means licensed. This is roughly equivalent to the Master's degree.

Something which is perhaps characteristic of Venezuela is that both Schools of Psychology (in the Central and Andres Bello University) were founded by psychiatrists. Consequently, the process of separation and individuation has been a long and painful one. At times there has been public questioning as to whether clinical psychologists should even be allowed to practice psychotherapy. Relationships with psychiatrists have not been very smooth, although significant advances towards mutual understanding and respect have been made lately.

Those who work in hospitals or psychiatric facilities do generally function professionally under the supervision of a psychiatrist, but this is not so for those who work privately or in counseling centers.

Clinical psychologists probably are the most prestigious among their colleagues in other branches of psychology. The educated people would rather "need" a psychologist than a psychiatrist. The people at large still view them with "fearful respect."

There are only two graduate programs in clinical psychology, both functioning in hospitals (*Militar*, a general hospital, and *El Peñon*, a psychiatric state hospital). Both require an internship of

BUSTAMANTE

one to two years duration. There are not any special training centers for the preparation of psychotherapists. The gestalt, psychodrama, and new group approaches are very attractive to some people and a couple of "growth centers" have flourished, but none has as yet completed any training program. It is hard indeed to be a psychologist in Venezuela and hard indeed to be a therapist (both Schools of Psychology in Caracas are not even 20 years old yet, which means that the profession has yet to do a lot of growing).

The most influential school has been psychoanalysis. But things are changing, and behavioristic orientations are letting themselves be heard. The client-centered approach has a few adherents, but dynamically oriented psychotherapy has been by far the most influential.

The great majority of clinical psychologists are women, which tends to make of it a "feminine" profession with all the implications of this stereotype culturally. Perhaps something to be noted is the influence of Spanish Catholicism and its emphasis on redemption, suffering, resignation, etc.; all of these have profound implications for the therapist-helper as well as for those who seek help. Many people are still much more likely to go to a priest in search of healing for their personal problems, rather than to a psychotherapist.

In the future, training programs will be more demanding and better organized. The need for good graduate programs will become more widely acknowledged and this hopefully will result in closer relationships between those who practice psychotherapy, regardless of their basic training. Competition and increased membership will require the approval of a law regulating the practice of psychotherapy.