

ARTICLE

Allowing for Ambiguity in the Social Sciences

Else Frenkel-Brunswik's methodological practice in *The Authoritarian Personality*

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Abstract

This paper presents an assessment of Else Frenkel-Brunswik's contributions to the social sciences by reconstructing both her research practice and methodological reflections on this practice, which are most prominent in the qualitative methodology used in her parts of the study *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950). After a brief discussion of the study's general methodology, we contextualize the qualitative parts done by Frenkel-Brunswik along her earlier lines of research, looking at the impact of her pre-emigration influences of logical empiricism, academic psychology, and psychoanalysis in Vienna as well as her experience of persecution and exile. We argue that her understanding of ambiguity was key to her methodology from an early stage onwards, and was key to her distinctive confrontation with Nazi psychologist Erich R. Jaensch. Building upon findings from the Archive for the History of Sociology in Austria (AGSÖ) in Graz and the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO) in New York, this article reevaluates Else Frenkel-Brunswik's epistemological position within the context of the study *The Authoritarian Personality*, allowing for a full appreciation of her role and contributions to the field of research on authoritarianism.

Keywords

Else Frenkel-Brunswik, *The Authoritarian Personality*, history of social science methodology, psychoanalysis and sociology, Theodor W. Adorno, historical praxeology, mixed methods, research on authoritarianism

INTRODUCTION

To this day, the study *The Authoritarian Personality*, written collectively by Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson and R. Nevitt Sanford in the late 1940s (Adorno et al. 1950), is considered to be an outstanding example of interdisciplinarity in social research and one of the central works on authoritarianism. For decades, the study's strengths and weaknesses were widely discussed (see Christie and Jahoda 1954; Stone, Lederer and Christie 1993), yet criticism and

acknowledgement mainly focused on the quantitative parts, above all the infamous F scale that measured a potentially “fascist” set of attitudes. With notable exceptions (Hopf 1993; Fleck 2011), the predominantly qualitative parts of *The Authoritarian Personality*—and correspondingly their main author, Else Frenkel-Brunswik—were given scant attention in these debates and eventually fell into oblivion. It seems that the recent rediscovery of “the authoritarian personality,” influenced by current phenomena of authoritarianism in Europe, Latin America, and the U.S., has resulted in a reemerging interest in the study’s broader context, not least the impact of Else Frenkel-Brunswik’s work (Marasco 2018; Gordon 2021).

This paper tries to reconstruct Else Frenkel-Brunswik’s methodology used in *The Authoritarian Personality*, and discusses this against the background of a historical analysis of the methodology she developed in her work in general. In our archival research, we focus both on Frenkel-Brunswik’s practices of social research as well as her own methodological reflection of these practices.¹ The article thus aims to undertake a sociogenetic inquiry into her work (Bourdieu 1993; Heilbron 2011). An approach like this is not an end in itself. Instead, with its reflexive focus on the conditions of the possibility of knowledge produced in *The Authoritarian Personality*, it not only makes visible its diverse influences, but ultimately adds to the discussion of the many ways in which the study is providing inspiration for today’s research into current authoritarianism (e.g. Gordon 2018; Steinert 2007a). Some of the questions to be dealt with are: What was Else Frenkel-Brunswik’s role in the research team of *The Authoritarian Personality*? How did she follow up on her earlier work carried out both before being exiled and after her flight to the United States? In which ways did her parts of the study come in for criticism by the numerous critics of *The Authoritarian Personality*?

Firstly, a brief discussion of the study’s general methodology is followed by a closer examination of the qualitative parts done by Else Frenkel-Brunswik. From there her work is contextualized within her earlier lines of research, with consideration given to the impact of her pre-emigration influences of logical empiricism, academic psychology, and psychoanalysis, as well as her experience of persecution and exile. We will argue that her most outstanding conceptual contribution to dealing with ambiguity on a scientific level is her publication *Motivation and Behavior* (1942), which lays the groundwork for her later research. Her understanding of ambiguity was not only put to use in her methodology in *The Authoritarian Personality*, e.g. through her mindful way of interpreting data, but also in her confrontation with Nazi psychology, personified by Erich R. Jaensch. Since Frenkel-Brunswik’s approach to ambiguity not only implies ambiguity in empirical data but also includes awareness of ambiguity in her own methodology, we consider this a confrontation on an epistemological level. Building upon these findings, this article submits a reevaluation of Frenkel-Brunswik’s epistemological position within the framework of *The Authoritarian Personality* and beyond. It will be argued that only a detailed study of the theoretical and methodological practice of Else Frenkel-Brunswik allows for a full appreciation of her approach in the light of today’s social research on

¹ Contemporary methodological literature commonly distinguishes between practice and methodology, with the first meaning the many practices of doing social research from reading and conducting interviews to writing and analyzing data, and the latter referring to a theoretical reflection and justification of how all this is done (for a recent discussion see Ploder and Hamann 2021). In our paper, we deal with both under the term “methodological practice,” thus aiming to avoid a rigorous distinction between theory and practice of social research. In our view, the distinction is useful insofar as it is concerned with bringing the neglected “smaller” practices of research out of their shadowy existence, and with implicitly questioning the power relations that play a role in the canonization of some practices as legitimate methods while excluding others. However, we are not concerned with questions of “legitimacy” here.

authoritarianism. Focusing on the methodological level is understood as simply another way of engaging with the study's contents (Hyman and Sheatsley 1954, 70).

The source materials for this study are the archival materials available in the Archive for the History of Sociology in Austria (AGSÖ) in Graz, Austria, which holds parts of the estate of Else Frenkel-Brunswik, above all her correspondence and unpublished typescripts of later publications, and in the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO) in New York, which holds the papers of the *American Jewish Committee*, i.e. draft reports, memoranda, and some interview protocols of *The Authoritarian Personality* study.

ELSE FRENKEL-BRUNSWIK'S CHAPTERS IN *THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY*

The methodological approach of *The Authoritarian Personality* was based, on the one hand, on questionnaires using scales for "Anti-Semitism," "Ethnocentrism," and "Fascism," but on the other it also involved detailed interviews. These were based, among other things, on "thematic apperception tests" used to examine authoritarian personality patterns as "readinesses for responses" (Adorno et al. 1950: 5) to a potential fascist "offer." The F-scale identified the underlying dimensions of authoritarianism in the following variables: a rigid adherence to middle-class values (conventionalism), authoritarian submission to idealized moral authorities of an ingroup, authoritarian aggression against outgroups perceived to break rules, an opposition to introspection (anti-intracception), a stereotypical belief in mythical factors, a way of thinking that revolved strongly around the categories of power and harshness, a generalized destructiveness and cynicism, a comprehensive and far-reaching projectivity and, finally, an overemphasis on sexuality (ibid.: 222–279). Respondents scoring high on these scale items, i.e. "High Scorers," were linked conceptually to an underlying authoritarian personality syndrome, whereas "Low Scorers" were thought to be (relatively) free of prejudice.

Despite being interpreted as a study on the individual psychological causes of authoritarian attitudes, *The Authoritarian Personality* study was in fact reluctant to make statements on causal relations at all. Statistical correlations revealed that the authoritarianism shown among High Scorers was not connected to a certain political ideology, social background, intelligence, or education, but rather varied widely. "Fascism" was not reduced to a psychological mindset, as some interpreters have stated. On the contrary: In Theodor W. Adorno's view, most clearly stated in his "Remarks on The Authoritarian Personality" published only recently in German (Adorno 2019a) and English (Adorno 2019b), High Scorers were not to be understood as the exception and therefore a singular pathologic phenomenon but rather as the new conventional norm, the individual resemblance of a pathological society that had the potential to produce fascism.

Besides her co-work on the scale construction and the quantitative evaluation of questionnaires, Else Frenkel-Brunswik was also responsible for the "clinical" in-depth interviews, i.e. semi-structured interviews following an interview guide, to which the interviewers did not have to adhere rigidly. These interviews were conducted by several professionally trained interviewers. Frenkel-Brunswik's supervision of the qualitative research part included setting up the guide, training the interviewers, evaluating and interpreting the results, and writing up the case studies.

Frenkel-Brunswik's interpretation of these interviews by and large supported the results presented in the preceding quantitative chapters of the study. However, it would be misleading to state that

they only confirmed earlier results. To be sure: The interviewees were ultimately selected for their high or low scores on the scales, as the authors noted in the publication. But it was the exploratory interviews that led to lengthy discussions of hypothesis for the different items in the questionnaires and, likewise, the first versions of questionnaires informed the interview guide for the clinical interviews. There is thus no linear and separate development of the two methods used. Rather, both the questionnaires and interview guides changed over time—their respective results cannot be separated; rather they were intrinsically entangled. In fact, many of the study's later famous results had already been published by Else Frenkel-Brunswik and R. Nevitt Sanford (Frenkel-Brunswik and Sanford 1945)—to such a degree that after a meeting in 1944 following a conference organized by Ernst Simmel (see Simmel 1946), Leo Löwenthal wrote to Max Horkheimer that by uniting the two alliances, the Institute for Social Research and the Berkeley Public Opinion Study Group, the former would get “an affiliated field work which, for the time being, does not cost us a cent” (quoted in Ash 1998: 265).²

Regarding the structure of the in-depth interviews, it can be stated first and foremost that each interview was the same, with manifest questions and latent, “underlying” questions on the dynamics of the individual personality: asking a person about his/her vocation should thus also determine his/her attitude towards work in general, enquiries about income the degree of “money-mindedness,” questions on one's family history should reveal not only sociological classifications of the family background, but also aspects of parent-child dynamics like the father and mother imago. Asked about their views on minorities, the interviews should reveal “the cognitive and emotional line drawn by the subject between ingroup and outgroup and the characteristics he specifically ascribed to each” (Adorno et al. 1950: 322), in order to determine whether the respondent had negative experiences or was entirely stereotyped. However, in contrast to the “questionnaire highs,” who quite frankly and openly expressed ethnocentric and antisemitic opinions, the “personality highs” in the interviews were less uniform in their statements and seldom High Scorers in all respects (see Adorno et al. 1950: 333).

In general, corresponding traits established in the quantitative scales were observed in the interviews. As concerns the stance towards authorities, High Scorers showed an idealization of their parents and a tendency of submission to their authority:

Starting from this discussion of family relationships, subsequent presentation will show the very pronounced consistency, in the typical high-scoring subject, with respect to a materialistic, utilitarian view of interpersonal and social relationships. On the surface this may seem a kind of realism; actually it is pseudorealism, since it ultimately leads to an impoverishment and to hostilities in human relationships. The low scorer is of course by no means free of such trends although they are on the whole less pronounced in him. (ibid.: 356)

This is an example for Frenkel-Brunswik's careful manner of interpretation, since she was obviously reluctant to idealize the “Low Scorers” as the alleged opposite of the High Scorers. The latter nevertheless were the main concern of the research. High Scorers were said to split off a behavioral façade from the rest of their personality, leading to a “break between the conscious and unconscious layers in the authoritarian personality,” (Frenkel-Brunswik 1954a: 265) as she later wrote in a paper defending the study against its critics. Her main point was that ambivalence was hidden, neglected and

² To be clear: Sanford, on the other hand, was also well aware of the Institute's corresponding funds from the AJC. Therefore, the initial phase of the study was underpinned by a shared pragmatic approach towards each other.

denied in this break—handled, e.g. in the case of the mother and father imagos, only by “establishing two separate images, one positive and one negative (good and bad women), without, however, being able really to love either of them” (Adorno et al. 1950: 404). Values were not integrated as an internal super-ego instance but feared (and resented) as external authorities. “Readiness to exchange these authorities mainly in the direction of a better bargain is one of the consequences of these attitudes” (ibid.: 455), resulting in a kind of potentially free-floating readiness to submit to authorities—as well as to project the underlying aggression onto outgroups:

In order to keep unacceptable tendencies and impulses out of consciousness, rigid defenses have to be maintained. Any loosening of the absoluteness of these defenses involves the danger of a breaking through of the repressed tendencies. Impulses and inclinations repressed too severely, too suddenly, or too early in life do not lose their dynamic strength, however. On the contrary, abrupt or unsuccessful repression prevents rather than helps in their control and mastery. An ego thus weakened is more in danger of becoming completely overwhelmed by the repressed forces. Greater rigidity of defenses is necessary to cope with such increased threat. In this vicious circle, impulses are not prevented from breaking out in uncontrolled ways. Basically unmodified instinctual impulses lurk everywhere beneath the surface, narrowing considerably the content of the ego so that it must be kept constantly on the lookout. (ibid.: 480).

With this kind of a super-imposed, rigid cognitive structure, there is no place for ambivalence and ambiguity in the High Scorer’s personality, Frenkel-Brunswik concluded. From a political standpoint, however, it would also be bad advice to remove the current prejudice, since “the removal of prejudice from the potentially fascist person may well endanger his psychological balance. The social implications of such a step have therefore to be carefully anticipated and preventive measures to be devised in advance” (ibid.: 480f.). In short: For Else Frenkel-Brunswik, there were no short-cut solutions to the problem of authoritarianism, either from a research or from a therapeutic, pedagogical, or political point of view. But what was research design that did not take short cuts supposed to look like? In order to understand why Frenkel-Brunswik’s answer to this question appears to be relevant, we have to look back at the genesis of her methodological approach.

A THOROUGH LOOK AT THE SURFACE AS A NECESSARY CONDITION FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF DEPTH: A SOCIOGENETIC VIEW OF FRENKEL-BRUNSWIK’S METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Else Frenkel-Brunswik’s earlier works

Else Frenkel was born in August 1908 in the city of Lemberg (today Lviv in Ukraine). Before World War I, her family moved to Lower Austria and finally Vienna, where Frenkel initially studied mathematics and physics, then philosophy and psychology. At the age of 22 she completed her studies and was soon a member of the inner circle around Karl and Charlotte Bühler at the Department of Psychology at the University of Vienna, where she was responsible for the Department’s biographical research. She started to undergo psychoanalysis twice, once with Ernst Kris, a fact she hid from the Böhlers. After Austria’s so-called “Anschluss” to the Third Reich, Else Frenkel fled to the U.S. in June

1938, just in time to escape Nazi persecution, and started working at the University of California at Berkeley.³

Frenkel-Brunswik's personal experience with both psychology and psychoanalysis had led her to value both in their own right, the idea being a separate, thorough study of psychological surface phenomena⁴ followed by careful interpretations "informed" or "inspired," as she called it, by psychoanalysis. The basis for both was the collection of as much material as possible by as many available methods as possible—a "broad matrix of statements" (Frenkel-Brunswik 1954a: 263). The structure of her chapters in *The Authoritarian Personality* resembles this. They start with detailed descriptive surface phenomena and end with depth interpretations.

In the 1940s, this was far from trivial. The idea that attitudes could be "measured" had only been formulated by psychologists L.L. Thurstone and Gordon Allport in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Feck 2020: 219f.). More generally, it was not until the 1930s that interviewing became a "problem," involving observation and thinking about, as Lazarsfeld put it, the "art of asking why." Until then, interviews were mostly conducted in a manner which can only be called spontaneously positivistic: interviewers asked experts ("informants") to provide information on something of which they had superior knowledge (see Platt 2012).

This was not the approach Else Frenkel-Brunswik had in mind for *The Authoritarian Personality*. While making use of standard interview methodology, she aimed for further improvement and the development of new methods of interviewing and interpreting.

The subject's view of his own life, as revealed in the course of the interview, may be assumed to contain real information together with wishful – and fearful – distortions. Known methods had to be utilized, therefore, and new ones developed to differentiate the more genuine, basic feelings, attitudes, and strivings from those of a more compensatory character behind which are hidden tendencies, frequently unknown to the subject himself, which are contrary to those manifested or verbalized on a surface level. To cope with such distortions cues are available or may be developed to guide interpretations. The methodological safeguarding of such interpretations is one of the central problems in the approach to the interviews. (Adorno et al. 1950: 293f.)

In developing these methods, Frenkel-Brunswik drew on her own research. One of her first articles after her emigration to the U.S. (Frenkel-Brunswik 1940) can be seen as a paper at the intersection between the Old and New Worlds. Being a reflection of her experiences in Vienna, she later described the paper as "a blue print for future work which I have been following more closely than I had been aware,"⁵ thus becoming a maxim for her research philosophy. She wrote that interpretations had to be checked against surface data, in principle arguing for a methodological three-step-model from the surface to the depth to the surface. "In thus returning ultimately to the surface region, we will have attempted a deep psychology of the surface (*tiefe Oberflächenpsychologie*), rather than indulged in

³ For more biographical information on her life in Vienna and during exile, see Paier 1996, Kranebitter 2022, as well as the introduction to this special issue and the relevant contributions by Christian Fleck and Andreas Huber.

⁴ "We may sum up by saying that while psychoanalysis has been first in seeing the necessity of a distinction between the manifest and the latent, its conceptual apparatus has been inadequate in dealing with the manifest layer in its own right." (Frenkel-Brunswik 1954a, 269).

⁵ Else Frenkel-Brunswik: Letter to Fillmore H. Sanford, December 23, 1952 (AGSÖ 25.1.96.).

a superficial psychology of the depth (*oberflächliche Tiefenpsychologie*).” (Frenkel-Brunswik 1974 [1940]: 57).

When starting her empirical research in the U.S. at the Institute of Child Welfare in Berkeley, and thanks to a fellowship from the Social Science Research Council (Heiman and Grant 1974: 7), Frenkel-Brunswik followed her methodology developed in earlier works while enhancing it extensively. In *Wunsch und Pflicht im Aufbau des menschlichen Lebens* (Wishes and Duties in the Structure of Human Life), written with Edith Weißkopf (1937), the authors had examined 400 biographies from published books, self-reports, and interviews, and had differentiated between external data (behavior), internal data (experience), and data on achievements. They used this in order to prove Charlotte Bühler’s thesis of the “dependence on age of the individual profile of wishes and duties” (ibid.: 6), using Bühler’s five-stage-model for the course of human life. Most of the book was devoted to the surface study of behavior and achievement. This trained Frenkel-Brunswik in her descriptions of behavior and behavioral results, as was the case with “life course diagrams” of musical celebrities like Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner (see figure 1).

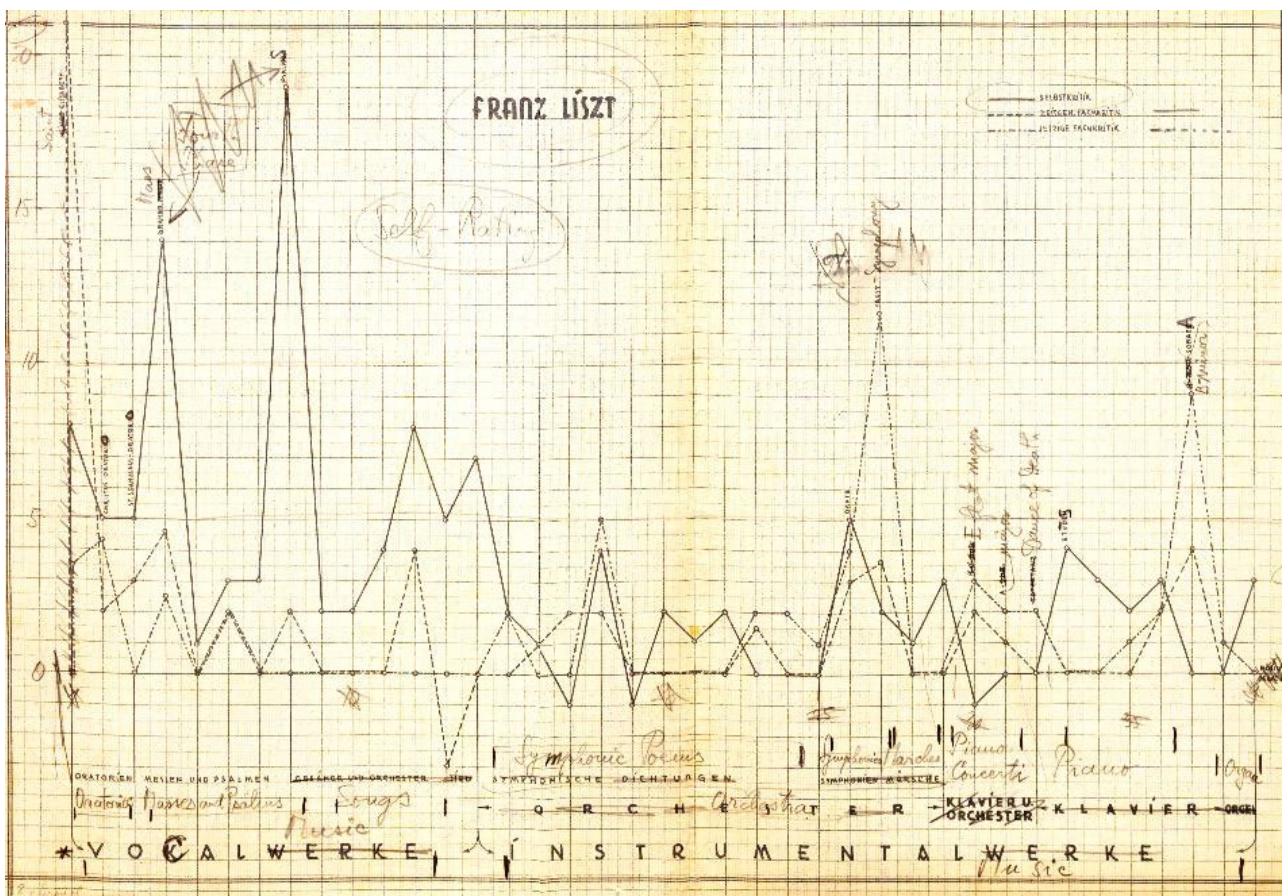


Figure 1: Graph showing an “Erfolgskurve” (“success curve”) for composer Franz Liszt, made in 1931/1932 by Else Frenkel-Brunswik during her project “Self-Rating of Achievements of Outstanding Personalities” (Source: AGSÖ 25.3.2.1.). In our view, this document shows that Else Frenkel-Brunswik not only intended to continue working on the project after her flight from Nazi Austria, but also did so, expressed by the English “corrections” on her German origin. While there is a typescript to be found in the AGSÖ, to our knowledge there is no English publication of this research. The archive document thus symbolizes neither a simple continuation of her practices nor a total break with them.

If at all concerned with perception, the authors focused on the changes to wishes with age (ibid.: 151–155). However, they also noted that their interviews, aimed at collecting surface data, would ultimately serve as data that revealed some form of reference to the unconsciousness.

In the course of the interview, we also asked appropriate intermediary questions on a case-by-case basis, which, however, were never suggestive, but served exclusively to clarify what the test person had already said spontaneously. We also insisted on keeping the statements as concrete as possible. All our questioning was intended only as a framework; it was not intended to be answered so much succinctly and precisely as to stimulate more of an informal conversation with the experimenter and to steer it in those directions which particularly interested us. The physician, who lets the patient tell him the history of his illness, helping him by encouragement and clarifying questions, is in a similar situation as we are; also, our method of our main experiments too is that of ‘anamnesis’. (Frenkel and Weißkopf 1937: 7; authors’ translation)

References to psychoanalysis, as the wish to conduct interpretations of underlying drives, were mentioned in this book (see ibid.: 8f.), albeit in hidden form. In a letter to Paul Lazarsfeld, dated October 1953, she referred to earlier discussions between the two about the role of Karl and Charlotte Bühler in their lives. Frenkel-Brunswik mentioned that while following a strictly behavioristic approach, she had already emphasized in this book that not everything was to be taken at face value. “Today, it is somewhat amusing to me that I put these considerations, which were already very important to me at that time, in small print and I wonder now whether I hoped that Charlotte would not read the small print.”⁶

Her simultaneous interest in behaviorism and psychoanalysis made her explore methodological ways of dealing with both the surface and depth layers of personality in a thorough, non-reductionist manner. With her first publication in the U.S., which came out as early as 1939 and used material gathered previously in Vienna, she developed the idea of quantitatively correlating “depth ratings” by expert raters with subjects’ self-reported data on behavior. In this first article published in exile, *Mechanisms of Self-Deception* (1939), she researched the auto-illusions of 40 of her former colleagues at the Bühler Institute:

The present study aims at an experimental investigation of illusions about oneself, and also seeks to discover formal criteria which may be used for diagnosing such illusions: The study is based upon a comparison between observations of the actual conduct of a group of students at the University of Vienna, on the one hand, and various kinds of statements made by these same students with regard to their behavior within the Institute, their ‘guiding principles’ of conduct, and their ‘demands upon the environment’ (i.e., their desires concerning the organization of the Institute), on the other. (ibid.: 409)

Their reported behavior and attitudes were contrasted with reports from “independent judges” who knew the students well, rating “in free form” the subjects’ personality traits, as they interpreted them. By operationalizing their ratings into statistical categories, Else Frenkel-Brunswik correlated an index of overt contradictions between self-reported and interpreted traits (ibid.: 411). In this way she

⁶ Letter from Else Frenkel-Brunswik to Paul Lazarsfeld, October 13, 1953 (AGSÖ 25.1.56). Bringing up this episode, she went on to reflect on how much their “identities” had stayed the same despite all the changes. “It was indeed very satisfying to see you again and to speculate with you and then by myself about the changes and developments we have all undergone without losing our basic identities.” (ibid.)

determined the traits with the greatest discrepancies and general trends of the distortions. Thus, she found trends of “distortions into the opposite” (e.g. he who lacks sincerity mentions “sincerity under all conditions” as his guiding principle), of omissions, shifting of orders, and shifting of emphasis (ibid.: 412f.) etc. In her sample, 27% of behaviors and 66% of attitudes were reported incorrectly when compared to the expert ratings (ibid.: 414). She concluded that in the majority of cases, reported attitudes were “life lies” and desires rather than “real” attitudes, which should and could not be taken away from the subjects themselves. “In a certain respect, auto-illusions about behavior may be considered comforting; and helpful, especially in the case of deep-seated defects. They may become systematized into a form of merciful ‘life-lies,’ as they have been dramatically called by Henrik Ibsen.” (ibid.).

“Motivation and Behavior”: Statistical analysis of depth

In our effort to reconstruct the development of Else Frenkel-Brunswik’s methodology as realized in *The Authoritarian Personality*, her prior study *Motivation and Behavior* (1942) is of great significance, since it can be seen as a comprehensive example of how Frenkel-Brunswik strove to deepen her understanding of personality, including the reconceptualization of her former concepts and thoughts.

The title of the study already pointed towards widening the classic behavioristic perspective on behavior by also including motivational aspects. Frenkel-Brunswik neither conceived motivation in behavioristic terms as a kind of internalized duplication of behavior (Frenkel-Brunswik 1942: 126), nor did she adopt “normative psychology” concepts of motivation she classified as implausible, since they were not verifiable qua behavior. In her view, the inadequacy of both approaches manifested the need for a new methodology, but also the criteria this new approach had to meet, namely supplying a deeper understanding of personality than behaviorism while also being verifiable through the observation of behavior. This requirement was met by two points we consider to be basic conceptual elements: (1) a constructivist conception of the notion of “drives,” and (2) a growing distance between data and interpretation, which led to her dictum of a “closeness of opposites.”

Motivation and Behavior was based on the observation and rating of the behavior of 150 students of public schools in Oakland, California (ibid.: 145), by three independent “judges” who had known the children for more than four years. The raters had diverse professional backgrounds ranging from school counseling to academic and clinical psychology, while one of them “[...] had a closer contact with psychoanalysis.” (ibid.: 147) A list of nine “drives” was handed to the judges, introduced as constructs distilled from psychoanalysis: the drives for autonomy, social acceptance, achievement, recognition, abasement, aggression, succorance, control, and escape (ibid.: 143f.). The judges were then encouraged to reach their assessment on assumed motivations, rather than similarity of displayed behavior (ibid.: 139). Apart from the ratings, there was further independent data collected in the form of the children’s self-reports (via achievement and attitude tests) and projective data (i.e. stories they wrote and drawings they created).

The ratings were reviewed by statistical means, as they were validated by inter-rater-agreement (ibid.: 150f) and standardized by averaging the three raters’ judgements, thus reducing “personal bias” (ibid.: 136; 160f.). Subsequently, these standardized drive-ratings were correlated with each other, as well as correlated with behavioral data, e.g. complementary ratings of behavior in social

situations (ibid., 183f). Finally, there was the intent of verifying the results with independent data such as self-ratings (ibid.: 241) and projective material (ibid.: 253f.).

The first accomplishment of this study we want to focus on is Frenkel-Brunswik's efforts to gain empirical access to a new dimension of personality: motivation. Moving beyond a behavioral perspective, the specific concept of "drive" applied in this study was inspired by psychoanalysis, while explicitly differing considerably from it:

The drives are here not conceived as faculty-like substantive units or vital agents [...]. The concept of drive implies a type of construct which may most economically and fruitfully integrate behavior data so that patterns of cause and effect may be recognized within the personality. [...] Drives may be conceived as comparable to the few factors found by factor analysis to account for many apparently diverse abilities. That is, a comparatively small number of drives in particular combination may account for a wide array of behavioral manifestations. (Frenkel-Brunswik 1942: 129)

Consequently, this concept of drive acknowledges flexibility, allowing a multitude of possible manifestations in behavior. The concept of alternative manifestations—being a result of the author's own experiences in psychoanalytic therapy (Frenkel-Brunswik 1940: 191)—found its implementation in methodological considerations, as well as its empirical verification via partial correlation (Frenkel-Brunswik 1942: 217f.).

The second point we consider essential regarding this study was Frenkel-Brunswik's efforts to move towards an objectivation of interpretation. The use of independent judges, drive-scales, and statistical means to standardize drive-ratings allowed for a comparison and "objective evaluation." An example of this is the correlation of the individual rater's own personality to the personality ratings he or she gave on a certain child (ibid.: 162). "The clinician relies on assumed relationships between cues and interpretation and often these assumptions of relationship are made only implicitly; here an attempt is made to analyze objectively the cues which have determined the interpretations of the raters." (ibid.: 136).

Throughout her study, Frenkel-Brunswik stated the necessity for concepts to become more abstract and dynamic in order to integrate more complex data (Frenkel-Brunswik 1942: 126). Explaining a wide range of behavior, assumptions are made about motivational tendencies that may not always be directly present in the behavior, but will eventually be verified through behavior as observed by raters. This more abstract consideration of data results in the possibility of one cause having alternating manifestations, e.g. destructive tendencies that can be shown in aggressive behavior as well as in "*exaggerated friendliness*" (ibid.: 127).

Any of the nine drives could be thought of as a tendency present in alternative manifestations in behavior.⁷ Asking raters to use intuitional inference when rating the behavior of a single child made

⁷ Frenkel-Brunswik compared this kind of explanation to the way of modeling explanations in factor analysis and structural equation models, comparing drives to their latent variables (cf. ibid.: 134, as well as the paper by Peter Schmidt in this special issue). Interestingly, at the same time she criticized this statistical analogy, the problem being that a latent variable "offers no way of handling the problem of alternative manifestations" (ibid.: 134). The cues between manifest and latent variable(s) being constant, structural equation models would still be too static, not allowing for dynamic concepts and thus the interpretation of situational differences.

their very process of inference observable and quantifiable in the last instance, i.e. it observed the observer himself:

Essentially, the procedure consisted in inferring motivation from behavior observed in a wide variety of situations. ‘Intuitive’ judgements about motivational tendencies were obtained in the form of standardized ratings from a number of judges well acquainted with the adolescents. These ratings, alongside of other, more rational, forms of inference about motivational tendencies, were utilized as a guide to dynamic personality. (ibid.: 134)

The observation of motivational or “clinical” ratings lay at the core of Frenkel-Brunswik’s methodological striving for an objectivation of interpretation:

Their advantage of the customary clinical judgements is [...] fourfold. First, the use of a rating scale permits quantification. Second, several judges can be used simultaneously, giving judgements in comparable terms, so that their ‘average hypothesis’ can be used instead of hypotheses of a single judge. The problem of reliability can thus be approached. The clinician uses the ‘bias’ of one observer, namely of himself; in our case it is the average and thus the more impersonal ‘bias’ of several observers. Third, the clinician relies on assumed relationships between cues and interpretation and often these assumptions of relationship are made only implicitly; here an attempt is made to analyze objectively the cues which have determined the interpretations of the raters. Fourth, the number of subjects can be increased with comparability of measures maintained. (ibid.: 136).

By integrating different source materials—from psychological and physical measurements and the ratings by adult raters to the children’s self-reports and projective materials like stories or artistic creations (ibid.: 138)—a variety of statistical correlation techniques could be used to check and balance psychoanalytically inspired interpretative procedures: “In conclusion, the present study uses statistical methods in a domain which until recently has been chiefly reserved to the clinical, ideographic approach. The attempt is thus made to combine exactitude, characteristic of the statistical approach, with the intuitive insightfulness, characteristic of the clinical approach.” (ibid.: 140).

In our view, these methodological ideas developed by Frenkel-Brunswik in her earlier works—especially in *Motivation and Behavior*—found their way into *The Authoritarian Personality*, thus exemplifying the influence Frenkel-Brunswik had had on the overall methodology of this study. There too, Else Frenkel-Brunswik would make use of different raters and thus of an objectivation of interpretation, with a reflexive observation of the rater and his or her position. In other words: Instead of being an objectivation of the observed, the focus is shifted from the single case, from the “problematic” or allegedly pathologic child or High Scorer, to the manifestation of “drives” in observable situational behavior, i.e. to the manifestation of the *potential* for fascism in certain individuals, not their allegedly static attitudes or their “personality” in the last instance.

In *Motivation and Behavior*, however, Frenkel-Brunswik still gave primacy to the statistical treatment and quantitative evaluation of observations, leaving out much of the material she talked about, especially the projective material. We would argue that this positivist angle, understood in a narrower sense, was gradually given up in her chapters of *The Authoritarian Personality*,⁸ and even

⁸ To reach a better understanding of Frenkel-Brunswik’s development from *Motivation and Behavior* (1942) to *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950) it is necessary to mention her Social Science Research Council fellowship in 1942/1943, which permitted her the intensive study of anthropology and sociology. In a letter she describes this time as “almost traumatic in its richness of stimulation. The last three months I spent pursuing my anthropological interests [...].”

more so in her later research on authoritarianism. There, she held on to the idea of ratings and their statistical “control,” but less rigidly so—which is why her chapters in *The Authoritarian Personality* can be considered the most complex manifestation of her methodological ideas.

Before concluding with some observations in this respect, however, we want to dig deeper into her methodology by elaborating on a chapter of Frenkel-Brunswik’s personal and academic life which is seldom discussed at length—the way Frenkel-Brunswik confronted Nazi social science.

CONFRONTING NAZI PSYCHOLOGY: FRENKEL-BRUNSWIK’S ANALYSIS OF ERNST RUDOLF JAENSCH

A crucial matter in Frenkel-Brunswik’s academic life was her intense discussion of Nazi psychology, as revealed through her close reading of Ernst Rudolf Jaensch (1883–1940), chairman of the German Society of Psychology (see Geuter 1988: 572; Wolfradt et al. 2017: 210). Never formulating a consistent critique of Jaensch’ work in one single paper, instead Frenkel-Brunswik dealt with it in her various papers (see Frenkel-Brunswik 1949; 1952; 1954b; 1954c; 1954d), essentially because it was a rather general issue for her. This also distinguishes her from many other German and Austrian émigrés, including Adorno (Adorno 1972: 500), who most often avoided any kind of reference to Nazi social science at all, simply labeling it non-scientific (see Christ and Suderland 2014; Kranebitter and Reinprecht 2019). Referring to Jaensch’s typology of personality in “*The Counter-Type*”⁹ (Jaensch 1938), Frenkel-Brunswik wrote:

Jaensch concentrates on a very articulate description of the most desirable personality type from the standpoint of Nazi ideology and [...] this type shows marked similarities to our description of the authoritarian personality. The fact that Jaensch glorifies this pattern while our attitude is one of reserve, or criticism, adds to the interest of this parallelism. The parallel delineation lends confidence to our interpretation of our results, since they are concurred in by psychologists glorifying the authoritarian personality. (Frenkel-Brunswik 1954a: 252)¹⁰

Taking this at face value, historians of psychology have sometimes pointed to this parallelism, of linking perception types to types of personality (Benetka 2020: 92), thus accepting Frenkel-Brunswik’s parts in *The Authoritarian Personality* as a mere negation of Jaensch’s work. In our view, methodological and epistemological similarities as well as differences require a closer look. Examining this prima facie parallelism of Frenkel-Brunswik and Jaensch in greater depth leads us to the conclusion that the authors’ methodology and epistemology differ significantly, thus rendering the

I hope to be able to write soon an article on trends in personality research as influenced by psychiatry and psychoanalysis on the one hand and anthropology on the other.” (Letter from Else Frenkel-Brunswik to Percival Symonds, October 18, 1943, AGSÖ 25.1.107)

⁹ Authors’ translation of the German original (“Der Gegentypus”). The translation in literature is both “anti-type” and “counter-type.”

¹⁰ This is followed by the view that the resemblance was a peculiar form of corroboration of the findings in *The Authoritarian Personality*: “The glorification of rigid stimulus-response relationships by Jaensch and the assertion of their predominance in the Nazi ideal fits with our finding that ‘intolerance of ambiguity’ is a frequent accompaniment of ethnocentrism.” (Frenkel-Brunswik 1954a: 253)

rather technical comparison of the respective typologies insufficient. In what follows, we give an introduction to Jaensch's typology and elaborate on what differentiates this from Else Frenkel-Brunswik's.

In "*The Counter-Type*," Jaensch distinguished two types of personality that differed in their ways of perception: the *I-typus*, showing an integrated personality (Jaensch 1938: 105), and his counterpart, the so-called *S-typus*, defined by his lack of personality integration. The term *S-typus* refers to Jaensch's assumption that this type of personality revealed "synesthetic" perceptions that stemmed, ultimately, from a "tuberculous culture" (ibid.: 241). Empirically, Jaensch tried to substantiate these hypotheses through perception experiments, e.g. experiments on spatial perception (ibid.: 276f.), time perception (ibid.: 290f.), perception of (surreal) art (ibid.: 307), and on drawings made by children under observation (ibid.: 315). Based on these experiments, Jaensch linked the *I-typus* to a rigid categorization of perception (ibid.: 105)—understood as a robustness of the ego against any outside influence—in comparison to the *S-typus*.

As Else Frenkel-Brunswik stated, Jaensch defined the *S-typus* by his "general lack of clear-cut and rigid evaluation of, and submission to the stimulus" (Frenkel-Brunswik 1954a: 253). The alleged strength of the ego against outside influences is central to Jaensch; due to the alleged lability of his ego, the *S-typus* is also characterized as "projection-type." As a consequence of the limitation of his insufficient psychological structure—e.g. missing values and instincts (ibid.: 333)—the *S-typus* was said to depend on the situational projection of his inner self onto the outside world. Furthermore, in his attempt to compensate for his "psychological lability," the *S-typus* would try to rationalize his experience of perception of the outside world (see Jaensch 1938: 49). This ongoing failure to perceive the *world as it is*, according to Jaensch, would eventually lead to the substitution of the real world for an image of reality, dominated by subjectivism (ibid.: 50). As a result, the *S-typus* was determined to be extensively "category dissolving," from the cognitive layer to his bio-psychological structure, whereas the *I-typus* was simply believed to apply objectively existing categorizations rigidly. Transferring his alleged findings from the personality structure to the social structure in general, Jaensch believed the *S-typus* to be the reason for a culture of dissolution—liberalism (ibid.: 44).

To summarize, "*The Counter-Type*" was written as a politically antisemitic pamphlet and it stressed the biological or "racial" rootedness and causation of psychological and social phenomena. In Jaensch's view, the *I-typus* was to be considered the ideal of "Aryan" eugenic race politics, whereas the *S-typus* was most of all linked to "the Jew" (ibid.: 22):

The dissolution type [...] in its pronounced forms, in the broadest and most comprehensive sense, is an extremely liberalistic one: for him, there are no ties in any respect; for this lack of ties is biologically deeply rooted. The [national-socialist] movement is ultimately one towards character; it fights characterlessness. Our dissolution type, however, always lacks inner firmness; and in its pronounced forms, it lacks character, which certainly presupposes inner firmness. After all, it was clear that the dissolution type is the type against which the German National Socialist movement is directed. We call it the 'counter-type.' Out of instinct, the National Socialist movement represents the conviction that the rule of the counter-type and of the cultural system created by it should not exist, that it is something contrary to the norm, unhealthy, something not intended by nature. (Jaensch 1938: 19; authors' translation)

Regarding the question of a parallelism of *The Authoritarian Personality's* High Scorers vs. Low Scorers and Jaensch's typology of the *I-typus* vs. the *S-typus*, we want to point out that the authoritarian personality was not simply the counterpart of Jaensch's glorification of the *I-typus*. Besides

obvious differences in the experimental approach of the two studies, in the question of a biological rootedness of personality, and, not least, in the questionable verifiability of Jaensch's work, Frenkel-Brunswik herself addressed an epistemological dimension at stake here: Jaensch had stated a "unity of style" (*Stileinheit*) for both of his types. From an allegedly unstable perception of stimuli, he concluded a corresponding unstable personality. In Frenkel-Brunswik's words, Jaensch "assumes this to be degenerative, morbid, immoral, and dangerous for society. 'Liberalism' of every kind – and 'adaptability' in general – goes with this lack of strong ties, according to Jaensch." (Frenkel-Brunswik 1954a: 253) According to her, this generalization was a simplification stemming from a rigid categorization that did not fit the empirical evidence: in neither the Low Scorer nor the High Scorer had such *unity of style* been evident. Rather, this was simply Jaensch's wish, who, "like our 'highs,' is struggling for a way out of his own and his culture's unbearable complexity" (ibid.: 255). As Frenkel-Brunswik stated, Jaensch did not consider principles such as the alternative manifestations of the same drives or the closeness of opposites. His description of personality became an example of rigidity in itself.

In spite of the rather consistent recurrence of elements of rigidity in various areas, there is no obvious or simple all-pervasive unity of style in the basic patterns of personality as we have conceived them. In surveying the attitudes which tend to go together in authoritarian individuals, we were faced with the coexistence of rigid perseverative behavior and an over-fluid, haphazard, disintegrated, random approach. This view of personal style thus involves 'closeness of opposites,' a principle not adequately understood by Jaensch. (ibid.: 255)

Jaensch's rigid categorization practices were not able to grasp the contradictions so often observed especially in *The Authoritarian Personality's* High Scorers. Indeed, one of Else Frenkel-Brunswik's major findings was to state the "paradox by saying that the authoritarian person tends to be consistently inconsistent, or consistently self-conflicting" (ibid.: 257). As was the case in her experiment using pictures that moved slowly from showing a dog to showing a cat, at some point rigidity was abandoned in favor of extreme fluidity by one and the same person. The same was true for other contradictions such as the simultaneous occurrence of cautiousness and impulsiveness, or generalizations and over-concreteness in the same high-scoring individual (Adorno et al. 1950: 465). The failure to unify contradicting needs marks the core of the High Scorer's personality, rather than any "unity of style." The high-scoring individual

combines within himself such traits as: rigidity with extreme fluidity; over-caution with the tendency toward impulsive shortcuts to action; chaos and confusion with control; order and over-simplification in terms of black-white solutions and stereotypy; isolation with fusion; lack of differentiation with the mixing of elements which do not belong together; extreme concreteness with extreme generality; self-glorification with self-contempt; submission to powerful authorities with resentment against them; stress on masculinity with a tendency toward extreme passivity; and many other seemingly incompatible opposites, which thus reveal an intrinsic affinity of style to each other. The higher-order unity of style given by these pervasive inconsistencies especially found in the authoritarian personality appears to be, as we may conclude, the result of attempts to reduce drastically underlying conflicts and ambivalences as well as cognitive complexities and ambiguities without producing reality-adequate or truly adaptive solutions. (Frenkel-Brunswik 1954a: 257)

Frenkel-Brunswik developed her own methodology essentially by confronting National Socialist social science on an epistemological level,¹¹ evoking a different practice of categorization and typologization. This characterized the high scorer not only by rigidity, but also by his tendencies to be inconsistent and contradictory, thus exceeding Jaensch's typology.

Jaensch, on the one hand, explicitly feared the *S-typus* for destructing and deconstructing categories per se, writing that the *S-typus*'s "imaginative and fantasy activity is therefore 'category-busting' or 'category-mixing'" (Jaensch 1938: 302; authors' translation). Frenkel-Brunswik, on the other hand, thought that a rigid adherence to inflexible and unsuitable fixed categories when faced with individual experience would eventually destroy the ego rather than strengthen it. This difference is not a superficial one: the two perspectives were indeed opposed to each other in a contrary and irreconcilable way—an authoritarian psychology in opposition to a psychology of authoritarianism (see Kranebitter and Reinprecht 2020). Referring to Else Frenkel-Brunswik's theorem in particular, Austrian sociologists Heinz Steinert and Gunter Falk criticized much of their discipline as "authoritarian," i.e. as ethno-centrist, reifying, and unable to cope conceptually with empirical ambiguity:

[A]uthoritarianism is a worldview [...] characterized by reification to deification of the given, of the existing canon of rules, a conception of the 'object'-character of what could also be imagined as 'made' and as process, which in turn can be explained from narrow categories and limited social experience. (Steinert and Falk 1973: 22–23; authors' translation)

Fitting this description, Jaensch's rigid categorization practice can be considered an extreme example of authoritarian conceptualization. Frenkel-Brunswik's repudiation of Jaensch's work is not a detail, but rather an exemplification of the difference between Nazi social science and a reflexive social science, one that led her towards a reflexive way of conducting science—not as social scientific knowledge obsessed with the search for the "good order" (*Ordnungswissen*), but one associated with the search for emancipation (*Befreiungswissen*) (Steinert 2007b: 388–390).

This crucial epistemological difference was a point shared by many contemporary psychologists, notably Gordon Allport, who explicitly repudiated Jaensch's typology in a presidential address to the 1940 congress of the American Psychological Association, and made a plea to "avoid authoritarianism, that we keep psychology from becoming a cult" (Allport 1940, cited in Stöwer 2011: 321). An emancipatory social science needs to overcome the practice of rigid categorization.

TOWARDS A DEVELOPMENT OF CONSTRUCTIVIST CONCEPTS

Else Frenkel-Brunswik and Theodor W. Adorno: A reevaluation of their epistemological positions

Re-reading Frenkel-Brunswik's critique of Jaensch revealed some crucial epistemological differences between an authoritarian social science and a social psychology of authoritarianism: Frenkel-Brunswik's use of categories (as well as methods) was dynamic and less rigid than Jaensch's. There simply was no unity of style, either in the high-scoring individual, or in the social sciences—this

¹¹ Reflecting her role as a scholar, Frenkel-Brunswik wrote: "Thus, for instance, I am thinking of myself as a woman of 'thought' rather than 'action'. I feel that the main line of contribution to society which I choose by temperament and inclination is research." (Letter from Else Frenke-Brunswik to Edward Tolman, AGSÖ 25.1.108). While here she is referring to the "loyalty oath" under McCarthyism (see the interview with Daniel Levinson in this special issue), this certainly also applies to her confrontation with Jaensch.

merely being the wish and (self-)obligation of any form of authoritarian sociology. Operating on completely different levels, Frenkel-Brunswik went far beyond Jaensch; a comparison based on a mechanical understanding of concepts like “types” would thus stay superficial. Rather, the whole concept of “types” was a different one, which did not affix reified social categories onto individuals but introduced dynamic constructs.

The results of our re-reading of Else Frenkel-Brunswik’s works led us to reevaluate the relation between the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*, first and foremost between Frenkel-Brunswik and Theodor W. Adorno. So far, mostly the differences have been stressed. But considering their agreement on dynamic concepts, Frenkel-Brunswik and Adorno seem to share epistemological ground. That said, our attempt is not an effort to label Frenkel-Brunswik as critical theorist, the point being that her productive and “constructivist” way of doing social science has to be located somewhere in between those categories. Hence avoiding categorization allows us to reach a deeper understanding of Frenkel-Brunswik’s influence in the overall study. We would like to introduce three points, which allow us to question the “primacy of difference” between Frenkel-Brunswik and Adorno.

Adorno introduced his well-known “typology” of High and Low Scorers within *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950: 744–783) with a nine-page manifesto distinguishing the authors’ “dynamic and social” (ibid.: 747) use of typologies from statistical and static uses in general, not least from “that kind of subsumption of individuals under pre-established classes which has been consummated in Nazi Germany, where the labeling of live human beings, independent of their specific qualities, resulted in decisions about their life and death” (ibid.: 745f.)—thereby referring to Jaensch in particular. “To express it pointedly, the rigidity of constructing types is itself indicative of that ‘stereopathic’ mentality which belongs to the basic constituents of the potentially fascist character.” (ibid.: 746) Instead of fetishizing and reifying psychological categories by an “attempt to bring some ‘order’ into the confusing diversity of human diversity” (ibid.: 747f.), Adorno saw his practice of typologization as a critical and tentative one (ibid.: 749; 752), as trying to establish types scientifically as the outcome of a typifying social world.

Secondly, Frenkel-Brunswik and Adorno seemed to have agreed on the question of how to “use” psychoanalysis for the social research required for *The Authoritarian Personality*, i.e. a certain reluctance to “instrumentalize” psychoanalytic theory or identify the interviews done for *The Authoritarian Personality* with a psychoanalytical procedure. As Frenkel-Brunswik put it:

Although these categories were to a considerable extent inspired by psychoanalysis, they should not be considered as psychoanalytic in the narrower sense of the word, since classification of our material is done primarily on the basis of present personality structure rather than on the basis of psychogenetic data. The entire framework, length, and condition of our interviews made it impossible directly to obtain material of a depth-level comparable to that of genuine psychoanalytic material. At the same time, however, there was enough spontaneous material at hand to make it possible for raters trained in dynamic psychology to infer some of the major structural problems and types of defense mechanisms in our subjects, in accordance with the categories provided by the Scoring Manual. (Adorno et al. 1950: 326)

Again, she clearly shared with Adorno this hesitance in “applying” psychoanalysis to “hastier” social research. In his “remarks” (Adorno 2019a, 2019b), Adorno stated that the authors were reluctant to superficially use psychoanalysis out of respect for it. In even more outspoken terms, in an undated memorandum written in fall 1945, Adorno warned against psychoanalytical “pseudo-explanations,”

as he put it, making demands similar to those in the statement quoted above from Frenkel-Brunswik's earlier works:

It appears to me both more common sense and more correct psychoanalytically to dwell on surface phenomena which can be interpreted as psychoanalytically revealing on the basis of our general knowledge than to make futile attempts of real psychoanalytical dives [which are actually dubious shortcuts]. Therefore I strongly advise a re-orientation towards symptoms which can be interpreted in terms of depth psychology, instead of flirting with depth categories easily deteriorating into a mere symptomatology.¹²

Besides these outlined similarities, which concern the critical or reflexive use of typologies as well as the reluctant use of psychoanalysis, a third similarity can be found in a critical stance towards contemporary culture and modern society in the broadest sense. It was Adorno who emphasized that it was a pathological society which was producing the potentially fascist individual, the study's High Scorer, as the "new man" better adjusted to late capitalism by thinking in stereotypical terms about what was conventionally "right" beyond individual experience (Adorno 2019a: 26f.). But quite similarly—and often ignored by research—Frenkel-Brunswik emphasized that authoritarianism must not be understood as a problem that concerns only a minority of more or less pathological High Scorers. Rather, conventionalism, defined as a rigid adherence to middle-class values, led High Scorers to resolve psychological ambivalences easily through their wish to belong to a problematic majority:

It may be ventured that the greater uniformity of the prejudiced sample derives from their greater closeness to the broader cultural pattern of our society. There can be no doubt that our prejudiced group shows a more rigid adherence to existing cultural norms and that its emphasis on status is in line with what has been designated by several authors [...] as the general trend of Western civilization. (Adorno et al. 1950: 484)

In our view, a similar approach in many epistemological and methodological matters exists and stems from their close cooperation during the production and interpretation of the material collected in the study's qualitative in-depth interviews, as can be shown from the archival documents. A more systematic analysis of this re-evaluation of similarities and differences cannot rely solely on these archival documents, but must also take the broader context into consideration, for example the differences between Else Frenkel-Brunswik and the other interviewers and authors of the study, namely Bill Morrow and J. F. Brown. To elaborate on this in detail, in the next chapter we will explore what was, at times, the suggestive character of the study's interview questions (see, most recently, Kranebitter 2020).

The practice of "inducing" as seen through archival materials

The archival material concerning *The Authoritarian Personality* available at the YIVO in New York, as well as at the AGSÖ in Graz, is mainly composed of letters, memoranda, and draft chapters. Yet, some interview protocols conducted for the study can be found, including so-called *Thematic Apperception Tests*, a projective method asking interviewees to associate freely when telling stories

¹² T. W. Adorno: Memorandum regarding case interviews and typological problems (the Institute for Jewish Research [YIVO], AJC Archive, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 18, Folder 7). In this memorandum, to our knowledge, Adorno outlined a typology for Low Scorers for the first time (thereby implicitly contradicting the claim that Low Scorers did not fit easily into categories).

relating to pictures shown to them. Some of these protocols were written by Else Frenkel-Brunswik, which permits a thorough reconstruction of her methods and findings from 1943 onwards until the publication of the study in 1950. To see whether her practice differs from the other interviewers, we would like to introduce J. F. Brown and Bill Morrow. Therefore, the analysis of the archival material is focused on one point of critique of the study: the suggestive character of the questionnaire and interview questions.

“Occasionally,” Frenkel-Brunswik, as the author responsible for supervising the interviewers, wrote in her introduction to her chapters, “some attempt was made, at the conclusion of the interview, to influence prejudice by argument, by making prejudice disreputable, or by other means, in order to gain information about effective methods of combating prejudice.” (Adorno et al. 1950: 322f.) In our view, in some instances this approach created a problematic practice during the interviews. The study suffered from a misconception about trying to “induce” interviewees, as the authors termed it themselves (see *ibid.*: 16), into revealing their “true” attitudes during the in-depth interviews. Since these interviews relate to psychoanalysis, one could argue that this practice has to be considered as a total rejection of the acknowledgement of the concept of the frame of the interview situation. In this view, the frame would consist of both “the inner world aspects”—the relation of interviewer to interviewee in their interaction, and corresponding processes like transference and counter-transference—and the “outer world” aspects, consisting of the setting the interaction takes place in, including e.g. the location, as well as power relations. To put it in sociological terms, what is clearly missing is the methodological reflection of the interview situation.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer¹³ emphasized the omnipresence of antisemitism, with cultural appropriateness permitting the open expression of this antisemitism only to a certain extent. The suggestive character of the practice of revealing the “true attitude” of the interviewee was, then, an attempt both to reveal the social desirability bias of the respondent and to look behind the curtain, i.e. to see whether the respondent’s attitude to antisemitism is more pronounced than on the surface. But in their attempt to reveal the “true attitude,” social desirability is twofold and thus eventually uncontrollable. Firstly, there is a social desirability regarding the (non-)expression of antisemitic attitudes, a desirability to be avoided if the “true attitude” of the interviewees is to be explored. Secondly, however, the interviewers create a social desirability of antisemitic expression in the interview situation. The problematic nature of social desirability in this second meaning of evoking antisemitism or authoritarianism in the interview situation becomes obvious in some interviews conducted by Brown and Morrow.

An example of the practice of “inducing” can be found in the work of Junius Flagg Brown (J. F. Brown). He was an important interviewer, a Marxist social psychologist and psychoanalyst (see Minton 1984) who studied with the Berlin Gestalt psychologists in the 1920s and who introduced the works of Kurt Lewin to an American audience. Being part of psychology’s movement outward from the laboratory, he must have been especially aware of the role of interview situation for responses. According to Brown, social psychology should deal “not with a laboratory fragment of man reacting

¹³ The motivation to do so is probably to be found in preconceptions regarding an omnipresence of antisemitism, as mentioned by Horkheimer in his letter to Adorno, “[...] one does not have to be a ‘type’ in order to be an antisemite. One simply learns to speak disrespectfully of Jews as one would learn to curse [...].” (Letter by Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, October 11, 1945, YIVO, AJC Archive, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 18, Folder 7). Combining this omnipresence of antisemitism with their finding that antisemitism, although present, is occasionally not shown in certain contexts, might have led to their eagerness to “induce” antisemitism in the interview situation and thereby reveal the interviewee’s “true attitude” behind the façade.

to isolated stimuli, but with real men behaving in a social world.” (quoted in Minton 1984: 34). Very much like Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Brown was highly critical both of nineteenth-century psychology, operating with overly broad theoretical principles, “based on such pseudoexplanatory concepts as instinct, sympathy, imitation, and habit” (ibid.: 35), and of “the post-1920 reaction by behaviorists that resulted in an atheoretical, atomistic, and mechanistic social psychology” (ibid.). Addressing, among other problems, the problem of the social position of the researcher in the “bourgeois region,” he can be called an early critic of positivism.

For *The Authoritarian Personality*, Brown conducted several interviews in Los Angeles in the fall and winter of 1945/1946, using the interview guide developed by Else Frenkel-Brunswik. The interview protocols by Brown and his team also contain several hints regarding the “induction” of ethnocentrism, some of which we want to quote here. For instance, to the question of whether there was a Jewish problem in the United States, “M45” replies: “I’m afraid so. Yes, it has become a problem. I’m glad you came to talk to me about this. [...] Guess I can talk quite frankly? I know you are one of us.”¹⁴ To the question of what he would do if he were a Jew, the same respondent answers: “If I wouldn’t know you I’d say: only a Jew can ask such a question because it sounds like TALMUD. No sense to it.”¹⁵ The interviewee’s impression of sharing beliefs (“I know you are one of us”) is not a problem per se. But evoking the impression of shared beliefs on multiple occasions becomes problematic, as it has to be interpreted as a manipulative practice of conducting interviews. The lack of consideration of the assumed agreement in a singular case becomes a methodological problem when further cases are affected. M 35, a multimillionaire in Bel Air, Los Angeles, answers the same question of whether there is a “Jewish problem” quite similarly:

Brother! If you ask such a question you’ll be sure to land behind the eight-ball. A problem! Why it’s no longer a problem, it’s a menace that’s threatening to wipe US off the map. [...] Do you mean it, or are you kidding? [...] Say – what are you driving at?¹⁶

Using the phrase “Jewish problem” leads interviewee M35 to suspect an agreement between him and the interviewer on what has to be “seen as a problem,” or even worse than that. The imagined consequences of “the problem” not only threaten the U.S., but also both of them personally on account of the repressive reactions that might follow their agreement on the problematic. Therefore, interviewer and interviewee become accomplices, since they share what the interviewee considers to be a “forbidden truth.” From today’s perspective, the question would have to be reformulated in the first place, but besides the wording there seemed to be a certain persuasive quality to Brown’s interview situation. Another case indicates that Brown formulated his questions in quite a convincing manner, as M46 replies to the question regarding knowledge of Jewish religion: “Now you’ve got me pal. What do you want to know all that junk for? You’re note [sic] going to start a Nazi party here, I hope.”¹⁷

Unquestionably, all these statements were given without any immediate influence from the interviewer on the answers and can be interpreted as the general attitudes of the interviewees. Still, in spite of his academic training, Brown was not fully aware of the influence of the social interaction

¹⁴ M 45, Not Married, Boston, M.D., Type: Oedipal (YIVO, AJC Archive, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 18, Folder 7).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ M 35, Not Married, Los Angeles, Type: Leader (YIVO, AJC Archive, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 18, Folder 7).

¹⁷ M 46, Not Married, California, Swimming Instructor, Type: Manipulative (YIVO, AJC Archive, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 18, Folder 7).

during the interview. Thus, the relationship of the interviewer and the interviewee lacks methodological reflection. The interviewer's precise influence on the interviewee's answers remains ambiguous.

A more severe instance of "inducing" took place at the San Quentin prison (Hyman and Sheatsley 1954: 56; Kranebitter 2020). There, Bill Morrow had 110 prisoners complete the 45-item version of the questionnaire in October 1945, followed by in-depth interviews with 15 inmates. The results of the study were presented in Chapter XXI of the publication and received great approval from the commissioning AJC. An internal, undated editorial revision even suggested that the chapter should be published as an independent monograph (Kranebitter 2020: 5). The authors' assumption was that prison inmates were particularly authoritarian. Both quantitative and qualitative material seemed to provide convincing confirmation of his hypothesis. The San Quentin respondents achieved higher than average values on almost all items, including, quite ironically, a very punitive attitude towards crime. However, on closer look, the results were achieved in a questionable way.

Even though Morrow acknowledged that the prison environment did influence the interviewees' response behavior, stating that the "general atmosphere of the prison [...] stresses compulsion and conformity" (Adorno et al., 1950: 819), he believed the effects to be of minor importance. However, not only were both the quantitative and qualitative samples strongly biased, since the selection was done mainly by the prison's chief psychiatrist David G. Schmidt,¹⁸ but Morrow also induced them to "speak their mind" when interviewing them in prison.

Although it can be shown that some responses were highly connected to the situation in prison and to the interview itself, social interaction within the interview situation was interpreted by Morrow as a one-way street. The effect of social desirability, that is, the interviewee's desire to please the interviewer (who was believed to be associated with the mighty psychiatric department), was interpreted solely as "authoritarian submission" to the interviewer. Expressing the desire to conform to conventional opinions, the interviewee would finally also submit to fascism, Morrow concluded. Not only is this a severe underestimation of external influences on the interview situation, but it is also a manipulative way of obtaining desirable results. The lack of assured methodological reflection of the interview situation leads to the misreading of the interviewer's own position. Morrow himself becomes an authoritarian actor during the interview situation. Further proof can be found in his attempts to provoke the "right" answer, as in the case of one of the "fascists," Buck:

Buck, besides supporting Nazi persecution of Jews, exhibits an interesting mode of ideological opportunism in his behavior toward the interviewer. The first three inquiries about his views on 'the Jewish problem' and 'the most characteristic Jewish traits' elicited only pseudo-democratic denials of hostility. For example: "They got a right to make a living as much as anybody else ... They got a way to make money is all I know. More power to 'em is all I can say ... I don't know much about 'em.' But with the fourth question he apparently sensed that he would not be punished for expressing hostility and might (judging from the interviewer's non-committal attitude) even gain approval for having the 'right' view of things: (Can you tell a Jew usually?) 'You're damn right I can tell 'em as soon as I talk to 'em.' From this point on,

¹⁸ David G. Schmidt himself was described as an authoritarian personality by the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*: "The prison situation and especially the psychiatry department (because of its top personnel) are highly authoritarian as well as very moralistic and conventionalistic" (Levinson, Daniel and Morrow, William (1946) Brief Memorandum on the San Quentin Group (YIVO, AJC Archive, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 19, Folder 4, 7).

Buck drops his façade and exhibits intense aggressiveness toward Jews. (Adorno et al. 1950: 834)

Mentioned here as an example of the art of interviewing, “unmasking” the real fascist behind his pseudo-democratic façade, in an unpublished memorandum Morrow openly speaks of having manipulated this interaction.

One particularly deferent high with a very externalized superego at first expressed somewhat friendly attitudes toward Jews: but he was quite easily induced to express rather violent and fascistic attitudes toward them when my permissiveness and only slightly provocative questions led him to feel that he would not be rejected for doing so.¹⁹

The main question resulting from this is: Can these induced attitudes be considered an expression of deeper personality structures in the interview situation? How much of this response behavior was, in another perspective, a concession to authoritative figures, as Ray (1984: 266) has asked, “to appear agreeable to the authorities” in a threatening institution like San Quentin? This is something we cannot determine today.

In the wider context this issue also affects Adorno’s typology. One of his sub-types among High Scorers, the “Rebel and the Psychopath,” often also identified as the “tough guy” and openly called a “fascist,” is heavily based on the San Quentin research (Adorno et al. 1950: 762–765). Even though Adorno acknowledged that there were not many “tough guys” among the interviewees, actually not one beyond the San Quentin group, this sub-type was mentioned quite prominently, despite the empirically scarce evidence and the problems of interpretation involved. Polemically put: The sub-type was modeled on Sinclair Lewis’ novel *It can’t happen here* and Adorno’s view of what he believed was the typical German SA storm trooper, but it cannot be found as an empirical manifestation within the study itself. This example supports Christian Fleck’s claim that Adorno’s typology was developed early on during the project without much consideration of empirical results (see Fleck 2011: 257–263). At the same time, we think that this neither affects the whole typology nor Adorno’s practice of typologizing itself—rather it shows a complex relationship between empirical research and typologizing, between a dynamic development and a static goal of “*Improving Teddie Typology*” (see figure 2).²⁰

¹⁹ Levinson, Daniel and Morrow, William (1946) Brief Memorandum on the San Quentin Group (YIVO, AJC Archive, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 19, Folder 4, 7.

²⁰ In our view, what is still needed is a closer look at each of the types and the precise changes made throughout the process due to empirical research.

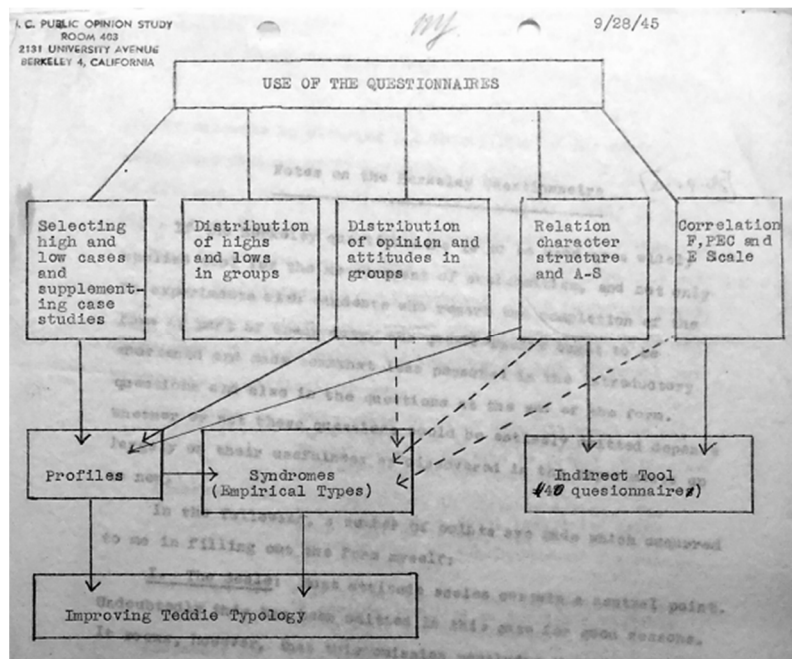


Figure 2: A graphic representations of *The Authoritarian Personality's* research design, September 28, 1945 (source: YIVO, AJC Archives, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, box 19, folder 5). In our view, it acknowledges both the pre-existence of “Teddie” Adorno’s typology and the aspiration to carry out theoretical and methodological improvement during the research process.

Admittedly, the “tough guy” sub-type might be the most pronounced example of this problem within the whole study, but in its consequences, it is a burden for the whole typology. The symptom of this burden is the practice of “inducing interviewees” into saying something that was not necessarily an expression of their deeper personality traits. The root of the burden is the missing methodological awareness of the (psycho-)dynamic implications of the interview situation (e.g.: Steinert 1984).

In some cases, the feeling of being manipulated as an interviewee became conscious even to them. Archival materials prove this for one of the high-scoring college girls, who were the first to be interviewed from 1943 onwards. In one interview (“case 7”), one of the women expressed her view of being manipulated through her interpretation of art. Being shown picture 8 of the TAT (see figure 3), she stated:

This is a psychologist doing one of his jobs. He is trying an experiment. [...] He wants to see how far he can put a person out. (Q-m) He wants to see what he can make people do when he has them under his will. The reclining person is a psychologist, too. They are in on this experiment together. They want to see through the mist of consciousness. (long pause) (Q-o). He is fairly successful. (throws card down in an irritated manner) That’s all I can do with that.²¹

²¹ Thematic Apperception Test, Case 7 (YIVO, AJC Archive, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 18, Folder 7). The same interviewee clearly shows an effort to please the interviewer: “I enjoyed it a lot. Of course, a lot of my stories didn’t turn out just right. I like to imagine things; I think it is a good thing to strengthen one’s imagination. (Q: Why?) It makes you think clearly, but everybody can’t do it. I don’t think I’m especially good at it. It’s really relaxing. I have wanted to be psychoanalyzed. Would you consider analyzing me?” (ibid.). All of these interactions and the dynamics involved were not interpreted any further.

Since, at the same time, this interviewee showed a high level of interest in the interaction, stating “I enjoyed it a lot. Of course, a lot of my stories didn’t just turn out just right. I like to imagine things [...]. Would you consider analyzing me?”, a more extensive case study of this girl in particular and the dynamics involved in the interview would be interesting to read, to say the least.

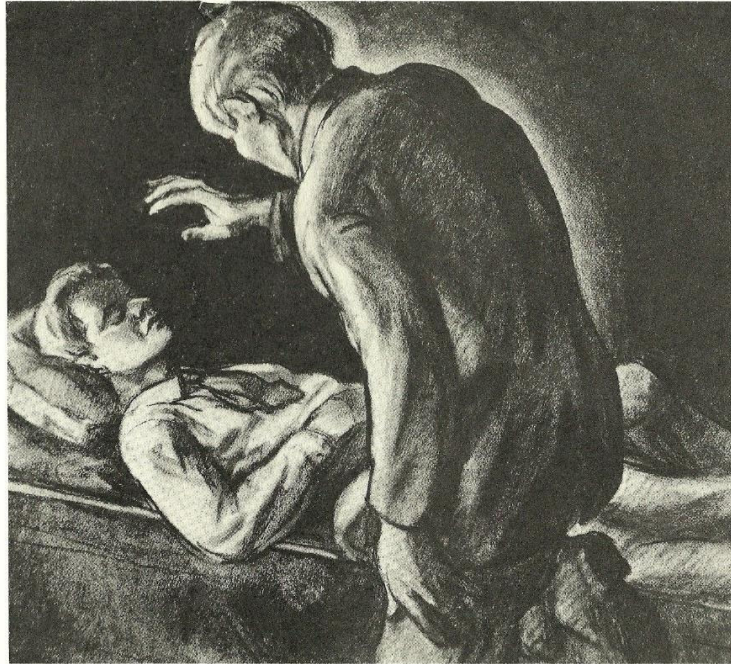


Figure 3: Image (“picture 8”) used for the study’s Thematic Apperception Tests (TAT) (source: Thematic Apperception Test, Case 7, “Female, extremely high on Anti-Semitism” (YIVO, AJC Archives, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 18, Folder 7; for the published version see Adorno et al. 1950: 508).

To summarize, it seems safe to say that the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* did not pay sufficient attention to their practice of “inducing” or to the interview situation in general. Not least, this conclusion is supported by the way R. Nevitt Sanford looked back at this practice in an interview in the 1980s:

S[anford]: If you interview someone, with the view of getting some data, and you pay no attention to the effects of being interviewed upon people who are being interviewed, or upon the interviewer, you are missing the boat really. [...] I don’t think it occurred to me so much when I was simply studying students, but when we began interviewing professors, I really became impressed with the notion of the potency of being interviewed.

H[arry Canon]: It wasn’t ‘til then?

S[anford]: Not really. I think the point when we were interviewing people in *The Authoritarian Personality* [...], I don’t think I was quite aware of the effects of the experience of the interview upon interviewees. But now everybody talks about that.²²

²² Transcript of an interview by Harry Canon with Nevitt Sanford, November 1984 (Nevitt Sanford Papers 1981–1995, Bowling Green State University, University Libraries, cac MMS 1963).

As Hyman and Sheatsley (1954, 80) and Mitchell Ash (1998: 267) have already pointed out, Frenkel-Brunswik only interviewed Low Scorers, not High Scorers, since the latter were deliberately to be interviewed by “gentiles.”²³ She herself reported: “The interviews with the girls who were found to be extremely low on antisemitism were conducted by myself, those with the girls medium and high on antisemitism were conducted by a non-Jewish, American, female graduate student of psychology, who had had contact with depth psychology.”²⁴ This was a rare instance of an understanding of the interview situation, which has parallels to the psychoanalytical setting, e.g. taking into account phenomena such as transference and countertransference between the interviewer and the interviewee.²⁵

In our attempt to reconstruct Else Frenkel-Brunswik’s approach towards the practice of interviewing, we started by examining the interviewers Brown and Morrow and their extensive use of “inducing.” Archival materials indicate that Else Frenkel-Brunswik herself, contrary to the other two, had at least some awareness of the interview situation, and at the least, no case of “induction” can be found in Else Frenkel-Brunswik’s own interviews among the archival material available.²⁶ This conclusion nevertheless has to acknowledge the fact that she was exclusively interviewing Low Scorers, not High Scorers. The question regarding the possibility of inducing Low Scorers, or possibly their resilience against being induced, remains interesting. But since she mentioned the practice of inducing only once and in a quite concealed way, and considering her earlier methodological considerations, it seems plausible to say that Frenkel-Brunswik does not appear to have been susceptible to the practice of “inducing.” We would thus conclude that it is thanks to her carefulness that the distortions found in other parts of the study did not spread to her parts of the study.

CONCLUSION

In bringing our sociogenetic reconstruction to a conclusion, we would like to summarize our main findings. Taking her earlier work into account, it can be stated that Else Frenkel-Brunswik’s initial expertise in developing methodology stemmed from her mathematical training. Inspired by psychoanalysis and herself unsatisfied with a solely descriptive approach, she widened her perspective, as seen in the methodology for her study *Motivation and Behavior* (1942). The methodology used there allowed for the quantitative verification of an ideographic approach towards “personality.” The challenging task of merging these two approaches was met by her conscientious integration of motivational tendencies into her primacy of verification qua behavior and following statistical analysis of behavioral data. A crucial innovation, which allowed for the statistical verification of motivational tendencies, was her modified concept of drive, which implied the possibility of alternative manifestations of singular motivational tendencies. Hence, *Motivation and Behavior* can be considered a

²³ See Else Frenkel-Brunswik: Description of the material based on the responses of ten girls, students of the University of California, and of some of the hypotheses which seem to have evolved in connection with them, Berkeley, January 1944 (YIVO, AJC Archive, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 18, Folder 7).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ A more comprehensive discussion of the particular matter of how Frenkel-Brunswik’s awareness of the interview situation is linked to her psychoanalytic expertise would have to include a systematic examination of the history of the concepts of transference and countertransference, as well as how their understanding has changed over the history of psychoanalysis. In this context, Körner (2018) emphasizes the prevalent rigid understanding of abstinence in psychoanalysis until the 1950s, related to an avoidant stance towards phenomena of countertransference.

²⁶ See YIVO, AJC Archive, RG 347.17.10 GEN-10, Box 18, Folder 7.

turning point in Frenkel-Brunswik's academic practice, since for the first time it went beyond positivism and quantification.

Further on we were able to illustrate that this approach not only helped her to deal with authoritarianism as a research subject, but also in her analysis of authoritarian research—as was the case for works by the German psychologist Erich Jaensch. A closer look at their practice reveals that Frenkel-Brunswik's work is neither a replica, nor a continuation of Jaensch's work. Frenkel-Brunswik's methodological accomplishment in grasping the contradictory and ambiguous aspects of authoritarianism is, first and foremost, an overcoming of Jaensch's rigid mode of categorization.

Stressing the dynamic side of Frenkel-Brunswik's methodology, we continued by re-evaluating her epistemological position in comparison to Theodor W. Adorno. Besides the traditional emphasis on differences, we found evidence for agreement on at least three points. Firstly, a similar stance towards the rigid praxis of an authoritarian sociology can be found, resulting in their reflexive use of typologies. Secondly, both approached the psychological depth provided by psychoanalysis carefully, interpreting authoritarianism within the concept of personality instead of increasing the use of psychogenetic data. Thirdly, both Frenkel-Brunswik and Adorno shared an understanding of the authoritarian character as a social phenomenon of a pathological society, emphasizing the importance of avoiding the pathologization of an authoritarian individual.

Finally, we were able to examine the practice of “inducing” in *The Authoritarian Personality* through the use of archival material. The lack of methodological consideration of the interview situation in this study clearly had an effect on the empirical data. In the case of J.F. Brown and Bill Morrow, two of the interviewers, “inducing” was used to an extent which questions the empirical provability of certain aspects of the study's typology. Although there is no certainty of Frenkel-Brunswik's rejection of “inducing,” we came to the conclusion that to some extent, she was aware of the interview dynamics. Archival materials concerning Frenkel-Brunswik's reflection on the interviewer-interviewee relationship, as well as the potential bias introduced by the interviewer when conducting interviews, support our thesis.

It is not an exaggeration to state that of all the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*, Frenkel-Brunswik is the only one to have been familiar with, supervised and used all the methods involved. When, in the light of her earlier work, she eventually moved away from quantification and a rigid understanding of positivism—in her parts of the study as well as in her later research—this was her deliberate decision, not the result of her having responsibility for the study's qualitative methods. Her shifting of research to the more “neutral ground” of perception in her further research on authoritarianism, thereby implicitly and explicitly responding to much of the criticism the study had received (Frenkel-Brunswik 1974; 1996), was accompanied by a shift away from quantification and, ultimately, a positivist approach within the social sciences. At a time when positivism was on the rise and decades before the “hermeneutic turn” in the social sciences (Steinmetz 2005), this was not a decision rewarded by the established social sciences (see Kranebitter 2022).

On the basis of our findings, we would argue that among the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*, Else Frenkel-Brunswik contributed to many of the study's strengths, above all to a position of *reflexivity* concerning methodological considerations (see Reinprecht 2022). In his interview with Dietmar Paier in 1992, Daniel J. Levinson pointed out that from the beginning, Frenkel-Brunswik's careful interpretations represented a big step in the development of the study:

And as I say, the big intellectual development then was Else's case study in developing more ideas about antisemitism as an aspect of personality. I think her case study then brought our work to the attention of psychoanalysts. See, what Nevitt and I did was more standard academic psychology. There were ideas about personality, but they were hardly developed. Her case study, then, was concerned with what would have been called the psychodynamics of antisemitism.²⁷

This is in accordance with a general emphasis by Levinson on the mutually stimulating ways of thinking among the four senior staff members of the study—a very reflexive and open-minded appreciation of the different approaches synthesized in the study, which changed the way of doing social science for all of them, the methodological and theoretical practice of the whole group.

What we had in common was an interest in psychoanalysis and in individual personality and in society, and the relationship of the individual to society. All three of us in Berkeley considered ourselves sociologically oriented, but I think we didn't understand how limited our sociological thinking was. We were very much involved in operationalizing concepts and measurement. But Adorno couldn't care less about measurement... [...] I think there are a lot of things we did for him and a lot of things he did for us. I consider it, all in all, a marvelous collaboration. [...] [N]ot that it was always happy or even mostly happy, there were lots of conflicts, but I believe that the end result was different from what would have been—and much better than what would have been—if any one of us had been stranded alone [...]²⁸

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²⁷ Dietmar Paier: Interview with Daniel J. Levinson, New Haven, 16 November 1992 (AGSÖ Tonbandsammlung). See the published version of this interview in this special issue.

²⁸ Ibid. Further on: “Well, he helped us thinking more broadly and stand back a little from measurement. He was somewhat free from the concept of operationalism, which has a kind of tyrannical quality.”

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