

A C U R I O U S M I N D



The Life and Legacy
of Sidney Jourard

A Curious Mind



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Marty Jourard

A Curious Mind: The Life and Legacy of Sidney Jourard.

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Author Notes

Many quotations from Sidney Jourard in this book are taken from a transcribed audio interview conducted in New Orleans on September 1, 1974 by C. Roger Meyers for the Canadian Psychological Association Archive (CPAA).¹ Unless otherwise credited in text or footnotes, all quotes from Sid are from this interview.

Gender bias in referenced and quoted texts

The English language is always evolving, as new words are added, previous usages become obsolete, and perceived meanings change through time. Readers of older writings encounter word choices that conflict with contemporary meaning and use. Sidney Jourard's use of the abstract noun "man" to describe persons of both sexes is now perceived as non-inclusive, as is his use of the word "mankind" and the related pronouns "he," "himself" and "him." Although to the contemporary reader these words stand out as gender-specific, at the time of their writing such terms were used by authors of both sexes to describe persons in a general sense. Rather than replacing Sidney's use of masculine terminology with contemporary alternatives I chose to present his words as originally written or spoken, along with the explanation that his references to "man" and "mankind" include all persons. This excerpt from Sid's writing provides some context:

Each person—man or woman, . . . —is a center through whom being is extracted; a center of orientation for the entire universe, a point of origin for action. Yet some persons are treated as if their perspective did not exist, . . . our society cannot endure in [this] form. The perspectives of everyone whom we have hitherto denigrated as one of Them will have to be heard and respected. . . . for the production and continuous development of a pluralistic society....²

Foreword

In the nineteen-fifties, it was customary for mainstream psychologists to view psychological health as the capacity to conform or adjust to status quo values and expectations of society. Conforming to what society determined to be “normal” was considered psychologically healthy. A new breed of psychologists, however, began to raise questions about this view, and fashioned a different image of the person as they focused upon the healthy personality and sought to promote the optimal growth of human beings. One of the chief architects of this humanistic, person-centered movement was Abraham Maslow, who labeled it Third Force psychology (distinguishing it from two prior forces in psychology, the psychoanalytic model associated with Sigmund Freud, and the behavioristic model promoted by B.F. Skinner).

In the nineteen-sixties, the University of Florida emerged as a significant center of Third Force psychology. Students from inside and outside the United States journeyed to Gainesville, Florida to be a part of the humanistic revolution in education and psychology. The authors of this Foreword were among them. I (Anne), a graduate of Brandeis University, who had been encouraged by Professor Abraham Maslow to pursue a doctorate at the U of F, drove south through KKK country to study with Sidney Jourard and Arthur W. Combs in 1968. I (Fred), an English teacher, ex-seminarian, and former merchant seaman, arrived in 1969 and began studies after reading books by Art and Sid which Anne loaned to me. We married there in 1969.

At the university, Arthur W. Combs, a student of Carl Rogers, taught in the College of Education. Combs viewed human behavior as an expression of human experience, including one’s perceptions of adequacy, and championed an image of the person as whole rather than divided. Ted Landsman, in the U of F Counseling Department, saw the optimal end of human growth as the “beautiful and noble person” or “best self,” someone intelligent and kind, productive and open-hearted, courageous and compassionate. Philosopher Tom Hanna, in his *Bodies in Revolt*

and elsewhere, described traditional culture as declining or dead and considered the human soma to be in a state of rebellion. Others who went on to make a name for themselves in Humanistic Psychology circles include Don Avila, Bob Blume, Walt Busby, Eleanor Criswell, Franz Epting, Dorothy Neville, William Purkey, and Betty Siegel.

One of the most transparently real and creative individuals among the Gainesville contingent contributing to this humanistic transformation of the image of the person was Sidney M. Jourard, a psychologist, therapist, researcher, educator, family man, author, world traveler, and a cherished friend. Sidney explored vital psychological questions and produced an impressive body of research and publications that are as relevant today as they were during his lifetime. Extraordinarily curious about his own life experiences and the experiences of others, he sought, through his research and therapy, to better understand the existential human condition in order to invite others (including ourselves) to live more authentic, joyful, and productive lives.

He wrote and spoke with a sense of both humor and urgency, warning that the “average” personality is just not good enough. He invited us to be magnificent, to be exemplars of self-disclosure, transparency, and genuine dialogue. Viewing each person as “a center of orientation for the entire universe, a point of origin for action,” he protested against persons being treated as if their experience or point of view was non-existent or irrelevant.

Sidney’s prophetic voice declared dead the small-minded images of God contained in doctrines and dogmas that excluded a reverence for life in all its forms. He recognized as unhealthy religious organizations conforming to the values of a capitalistic, consumer society and ignoring the suffering of the poor and marginalized. He spoke on behalf of persons of color defying oppression, racism, and social injustice and lauded women who refused to remain silent and who protested against the limits and roles imposed on them by a patriarchal society. He described lethal aspects of traditional male roles. He opposed describing the mentally ill as “mad” or “crazy,” believing with Martin Buber that not valuing what they tell us about living in this world can impoverish our understanding of our own humanity. And he supported the right of homosexuals to declare who they are and love whom they choose to love.

Sidney challenged himself and everyone by asking: “Who do you think or believe you are or can become? What do others—parents, bosses, spouses, partners,

neighbors, teachers, and preachers—tell us about who we are or who we have to be?” He cautioned all of us—persons of color or not, rich or poor, straight or gay, male or female, young or old—to carefully choose those to whom we listen, in order to discover and affirm who we are and who we want to become.

In his professional writings and work as a therapist, Sid often acknowledged his indebtedness to Martin Buber. Buber’s writings on Jewish philosophical thinking and mysticism, his philosophy of dialogue and relation, and his extensive study of Hasidism and the image of the Zaddik or spiritual leader of the Hasidic community resonated with Sidney’s image of the secular psychologist, the centrality of dialogue, and his growing interest in exploring his Jewish roots. Buber called upon us to go beyond the thinking that persuaded us to live life alienated from our true self and others. He felt that confirming the truth that rises up between persons in genuine dialogue is at the heart of a true religious life. In Hasidism, one honors human life by living it fully, sensuously, passionately, gratefully. The Zaddik, like Jourard’s image of the humanistic psychologist, invited others to be real by being real in their presence and to change by being nonjudgmental and self-disclosing. Ironically, during the years Sid spent searching for a deeper understanding of his Jewish heritage, his personal and professional life can be seen as an embodiment of this heritage.

Marty’s account of the life and legacy of his father Sidney Jourard describes the journey of a young Canadian immigrant as he becomes an American citizen, an internationally-known author and psychologist, and one of the major contributors to the emergence of Humanistic Psychology in America. In this publication, readers have a unique opportunity to read pieces of correspondence and excerpts from recordings of Sid’s presentations and lectures that clarify what is too often overlooked, even now, in psychological studies and descriptions of the human condition. We encourage you to thoughtfully examine and savor the material you are about to read, believing that it will lift your spirits now as it continues to this day to lift our own.

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Introduction

This is the story of a psychologist named Sidney Jourard whose work in the field of psychology focuses on one of life's more profound questions: How should one live? This biography was written to bring some of what he discovered to a new generation of readers, and to share insights about being a person that are of particular value in our contemporary culture.

Sidney Jourard was my father. I am his middle son, a professional musician and a member of a pop group that achieved commercial success in the nineteen-eighties and continues to record and perform today. I'm also a writer and author of several music-related books. I grew up in Gainesville, a small college town in north-central Florida, where my father was a professor of psychology at the University of Florida.

This book began as a modest project—I was researching my father's life and academic career for a family history archive. During the process I determined that his life was atypical in both content and style, and that his insights as a psychologist could be of value to present-day readers. I delved deeply into his academic career, and by integrating it with his personal life wrote this biography.

Starting around the mid-fifties, my father became increasingly involved in a new approach to the study of mind and behavior—Humanistic Psychology, a perspective developed by other humanist thinkers such as Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, Erich Fromm, Carl Rogers, Charlotte Bühler, and Virginia Satir. He was the first elected president of the Association for Humanistic Psychology (1963-1964). Among his collected writings is *The Transparent Self*, a primary text in the field of self-disclosure, a process by which one person communicates personal information to another person at varying levels of intimacy, ranging from likes and dislikes to hopes and fears and deeply-held beliefs. Sid examined the beneficial role of self-disclosure in personal and societal interactions. Other areas of his study and research include self-image and body-awareness, physical contact between people

and where they touch, the concept of authenticity (a state in which your inner personality is congruent with your outward presentation to others), the psychological need for privacy, perspectives on education, psychotherapy and marriage, and the relationships between body, mind and spirit. As early as 1958 Sid was exploring the subjects of healthy personality and personal growth, and developing insights that helped people become free agents of their own lives. He proposed that most people function well below their capabilities and have the potential to control their lives to a higher degree than they thought possible, and that each has the capacity to continually grow in both self-awareness and ability.

His life and academic career were intertwined in a way that often made the line between them indistinguishable, and his passion for intellectual pursuits was mirrored by a passionate and intense personal life. Sidney was an uncommon blend of cerebral and earthy, a rare mix that wasn't universally understood or accepted by others in academia. His keen intellect was combined with a mischievous personality and a well-developed sense of humor. I have yet to meet anyone who was even remotely like him.

* * *

Evidence of the continued presence of his ideas in popular culture appears without particularly seeking it out, and in unexpected places. During the process of writing this introduction in 2020, two examples presented themselves. My daughter is a massage therapist, and as she watched an online ethics course as part of her continuing education and certification process, the narrator mentioned Sidney's "touch study," a series of casual social observations he made between 1963 and 1966. When the socialite Paris Hilton recently remarked that "I'm so used to playing a character, it's hard for me to be normal ... I don't even know who I am sometimes," she describes a problem Sid identified in the late fifties: that the construction and continual reinforcement of a false public self at odds with your private self can eventually lead to self-alienation.

* * *

Perhaps Sid's overarching goal as a psychologist was to guide psychology away from the interests of institutions and esoteric areas of investigation, and toward the service of human beings and the everyday experience of being alive, as revealed in

comment he made at a psychology conference in the early seventies. A colleague who was there recalls:

I have no idea to this day why Sidney Jourard was on this particular panel, except I appreciate the irony of Sid being there. What the panel was about was paranormal phenomena. There must have been six people on that panel. And they talked about seeing ghosts, and moving objects without touching them, and sensing the communication of humans from one person to another without the ordinary methods of communication like talking or writing or those kinds of things; laying on of hands. . . . Sidney Jourard was the last person on the panel, and what he said was, “We’ve been treated today to one miracle after another, and what I want to say is, that I’m not impressed. I’m having enough trouble just trying to keep my life together. And what I want is a psychology that teaches us how to live. Daily. Just keeping our lives together. And then, if we’ve got that kind of psychology, perhaps we’ll have time for miracles.”¹

Sidney developed valuable insights for anyone striving to better recognize and understand the controlling forces that drive their lives and who seek to recognize those that are counter-productive to their personal growth. His ideas, insights and persona will be found herein, along with my belief that among his views you may find some that bring insight into the workings of your own life.