

**THEORETICAL ARTICLE**

**Psychological Assessment**

**Editor**

Raquel Souza Lobo Guzzo

**Support**

Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes) – Process nº 88887148057/2017-00.

**Conflict of interest**

The authors declare they have no conflicts of interest.

**Received**

May 7, 2021

**Approved**

June 5, 2023

# Child development and adaptation: Relation between Jungian propositions and the concept of adaptive functioning

## *Desenvolvimento infantil e adaptação: relações entre proposições junguianas e o conceito de funcionamento adaptativo*

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Article based on the dissertation by M. F. FILLUS, entitled “*Brincando com os sonhos: recurso interventivo grupal breve a partir de conteúdos oníricos – Uma proposta para crianças vítimas de violência*”. Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 2020.

**How to cite this article:** Fillus M. A., & Wahba, L. L. (2024). Child development and adaptation: Relation between Jungian propositions and the concept of adaptive functioning. *Estudos de Psicologia* (Campinas), 41, e210081. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-0275202441e210081>

### Abstract

#### Objective

This paper proposes a theoretical review that aims to understand the notion of adaptation according to the psychodynamic approach of Analytical Psychology, associated with the psychological construct of adaptive functioning, the latter being measurable through “conceptual, social, and practical” domains.

#### Method

Integrative literature review.

#### Results

Adaptive functioning domains may be analytically interpreted in terms of personality development, self-agency, adaptation to external and internal conditions, conscious skills, and unconscious aspects inferred from the clinical context.

#### Conclusion

The proposed theoretical construction is expected to be useful for clinical psychology and for mixed methods research, integrating results of psychological testing instruments based on adaptive functioning domains.

**Keywords:** Human development; Jungian theory; Psychological adaptation; Psychometrics.

## Resumo

### Objetivo

É proposta uma revisão teórica que visa compreender a noção de adaptação a partir da abordagem psicodinâmica da Psicologia Analítica, associada ao construto psicológico de funcionamento adaptativo, este último passível de mensuração mediante domínios “conceituais, sociais e práticos”.

### Método

Revisão integrativa de literatura.

### Resultados

Domínios do funcionamento adaptativo podem vir a ser interpretados analiticamente em termos de desenvolvimento da personalidade, agenciamento do eu, adaptação às condições externas e internas, habilidades conscientes e aspectos inconscientes inferidos a partir do contexto clínico.

### Conclusão

A construção teórica proposta se antevê de utilidade para a clínica e para pesquisas mistas, integrando resultados de instrumentos de testagem psicológica baseados nos domínios do funcionamento adaptativo.

**Palavras-chave:** Desenvolvimento humano; Teoria junguiana; Adaptação psicológica; Psicometria.

This paper proposes a theoretical review aimed at understanding the notion of adaptation from the psychodynamic approach of analytical psychology, associated with the psychological construct of adaptive functioning, the latter measurable through “conceptual, social, and practical” domains (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2014). The application of the notion of adaptive functioning is useful to analytically support the understanding of information derived from the measurement of psychological phenomena in psychological assessment processes and for mixed methods research, as well as for understanding the effects of therapeutic interventions and psychotherapy. It helps to assess criteria to understand the development of personality, self-agency, adaptation to external and internal conditions, conscious skills, and unconscious aspects inferred from the clinical context.

Importantly, adaptation, in this article, is not considered synonymous with adjustment, but an elementary factor essential to life. That is, we start from the idea of “adaptability” as a broad characteristic that living beings, not only humans, develop as a fundamental scope for survival. By adopting a psychological and dynamic perspective, adaptation is understood as a process in which internal and external components intervene in the individual. In human development, adaptability is psychologically understood as the regulation between internal contents and external influences, in which the ego, progressively in its maturation, plays a leading role in the capacity of mediation, a function highlighted in the postulations of Analytical Psychology as the foundation of psychic adaptation.

The notion of adaptation intertwined with the construct of adaptive functioning encompasses knowledge originating from various sources. To arrive at the proposition presented, we initially sought a psychodynamic understanding of the notion of adaptation in children’s experience. It started with a review of Carl Gustav Jung’s main ideas about the term – relevant to child development – articulated with the developmental propositions of Michael Fordham (1970, 1976, 2002) and Jean Knox (1999, 2003, 2004, 2011), with the aim of translating Jungian ideas on adaptation into the child’s developmental trajectory. Recent theories of attachment relationships and their importance in healthy or impaired development were considered.

## Notions of Adaptation in Jung's Work

Broadly, Jung suggests that the notion of adaptation is important for a psychological understanding, as it presumes that the psychic system, grounded biologically, can only be understood as a "system of adaptation" (Jung, 1920/2013a, p. 152). He also suggests the interactive factor of adaptation, considering that the relation between subject and object will always result in an adaptive interaction, whereby both will reciprocally modify each other. These modifications shape adaptation (Jung, 1920/2013a).

In Jungian work, the notion of adaptation is linked to two fundamental characteristics: the process of balance between the demands of the so-called external world and the internal world of the individual, and the function of the ego as the subject of conscious efforts of adaptation, without excluding, of course, its mobilization by unconscious dynamics.

The first characteristic is expressed schematically in *The Symbolic Life*, a work in which Jung (1916/2012) synthesizes that adaptation consists of two processes: "adaptation to internal conditions and adaptation to external conditions". The author defines that the former does not solely represent the environment, but includes "conscious judgments" (Jung, 1916/2012, p. 1085), and that the latter is an adaptation to the unconscious, since it generates occurrences that impinge on conscious intention and can oppose conscious judgment. The notion of two dimensions, external and internal – though interconnected, is a keynote throughout Jung's work, permeating both the idea of adaptation and maladaptation.

A second characteristic is that, in Jung's work, the phenomenon of consciousness appears as a determining factor for the notion of adaptation. In *Aion*, Jung (1950/2013b) emphasizes that the ego is the reference point in consciousness, as the subject of the movement of adaptation concerning that which is deliberately produced. Adaptation, he adds, needs a conscious direction with internal consistency and logical coherence (Jung, 1928/2013c). The author highlights that consciousness, in addition to dealing with present needs or the facts of the moment, is responsible for the psychological adaptation efforts of the subject, based on "discrimination, distinction between self and non-self, subject and object, yes and no" (Jung, 1920/2013a, p. 170) and is a determining factor for social adaptation (Jung, 1958/2013d).

Starting from the two basic characteristics of adaptation in Jungian work – adaptation to internal and external dimensions and the role of ego and consciousness in promoting adaptations – , propositions on child development will be presented based on post-Jungian authors. This begins with the genesis of the dichotomy between the internal and external world in the infantile experience (psychic structuring), the development of ego and identity postulated by the notion of ego agency proposed by Knox (2011), which can be translated as the power to be active, and finally, depicting the path of adaptation that the child needs to undertake.

## Propositions on Child Development and its Relationship to the Notion of Adaptation

### Adaptation to Internal and External Dimensions

To understand the child's need to adapt to internal conditions and external events, it is necessary to clarify how these apprehensions develop. Jung (1936/2014) understands that the brain

of a newborn is differentiated, structured by heredity in its basic structure and to some extent individualized. Within it, it would already be possible to observe “specific predispositions, which condition a selectivity and organization of perception that are particular to it (individual)” (Jung, 1936/2014, p. 136). The specific predispositions of the baby would have as their foundation universal determinants, called archetypes, and a relationship between universal and individual would pervade the genesis of the psyche.

The classical perspective is contested as it implies a consequent passivity of the individual in the face of the determinism of the “invisible forces” that direct development. New propositions arise from Michael Fordham’s research, suggesting that development involves an active protagonism of the child and has an interactive aspect with the environment. Fordham (1970) introduces the idea of a dynamic and interactive Self, as a primary state that would originate the structures for interacting with the environment, favoring the satisfaction of basic survival needs. The supposed passivity in the face of development is contradicted by a perspective that the Self is a dynamic component that acts from the beginning of psychic life.

The process of deintegration and reintegration, even when the boundaries between inner and outer needs are poorly defined, can be seen as an adaptive effort for survival. As per Fordham (1970), at the beginning, the baby experiences a deintegrative movement that will trigger a response from the environment, and from this response, the reintegration of impressions and patterns from the environment may occur. Initially, movements occur due to the satisfaction of basic needs, which are fundamental for survival. The Self would be a basic impulse towards life.

Fordham (1970) emphasizes that a satisfactory response from the mother will allow the deintegrated elements to be reintegrated into the child’s psyche. The affective pair, mother and child, provides for the initial discharges to be understood, enabling increasing adaptation to the external environment (initially representing survival itself). According to Astor (1998), Fordham’s innovation is to suppose that the Self – understood as the primary psychosomatic unit – provides the basis for the baby’s initial responses to the world.

The child’s attachment to the mother is fundamental for their psychic birth. The mother, giving meaning to the baby’s intentions, provides an experience of a contained, safe, and attentive world, encouraging the child’s increasingly autonomous movements. Emerging in this relationship, the internal environment will be populated with initial impressions, as it is through reintegration that the process of structuring of the mind and a world of images, emotions, and meanings begins.

Fordham (2002) defines that deintegration and reintegration consist of a floating learning process, as the baby opens to new experiences and reintegrates them to consolidate them. There will be progressively greater separation between fantasy and concrete reality, between what is understood as the external world and the internal world, making subject and object increasingly distinct. Such perspective differs from a passive view of development, considering the child as a being capable of presenting deintegrative demands of the Self and of integrating the marks of their first relationships, to constitute the basis of their initial experiences, outside of the symbiosis with the parental unconscious.

Astor (1998) explains that as Fordham discovered the active processes in childhood, he understood the child as a separate unit with an original Self, a function that organizes the experience. The child, from a developmental perspective, will focus on external adaptation, in the sense of learning to live in a certain environment, and on internal adaptation, arising from their psychic organization and structure, in a continuous process of individuation that begins with reintegrated experiences within a coherent continuity of the somatopsychic organism.

Knox (2003), in turn, does not elaborate a new idea of an organizing centrality, but complements that there would be basic schemas, organizers in the infant psyche that emerge in relation to the other. This proposition highlights that what we inherit are primary tendencies of perception and response to basic stimuli linked to the foundation of survival. The rest are developed in interaction with another human being. Jung (1936/2014) had already warned that no imagery content could be inherited, and Knox (2003) clarifies this perspective, emphasizing that psychic contents would emerge from very simple perceptions and basic behavioral patterns. The repetition of experiences would gradually provide a series of imagistic and affective information that is integrated into the child's inner world. These contents reflect the child's fundamental first experiences, constituting themselves as basic human patterns of interaction with the environment from the beginning of life. This constitutes a condition of implicit learning, understood as a "process and emergent pattern of relationship that provides meaning for the infant's perception of the physical world and of human relationships" (Knox, 2003, p. 66).

Agreeing with the interactionist emphasis of development, Stern (2018) postulated, with the concept of representations of interactions that have been generalized (RIGs), the notion of flexible structures containing patterns of interaction of emotional elements, understood as fantasies and expectations about interactions with significant others. When experiencing similar emotions, affect around a RIG could be evoked, consisting of generalized memories and reactivations of experiences previously lived. Knox's (2003) and Stern's (2018) considerations, added to later authors such as Jacoby (2019), Feldman (2018), and Leahy (2023), aim to expand the notion of archetypal structures and help to understand the dynamics of early-life development.

From the presented authors, it is understood that the child's interactive and active factor from the very beginning is its main adaptive asset that ensures the conditions for survival. Considering the propositions of Fordham, Stern, and Knox, in early life, the adaptive tasks to external conditions could be understood basically as stimulating caregiver attachment to survive. In the internal polarity, from reintegrates of the Self – basic organizing schemes or RIGs – it would be adaptive to progressively organize basic conceptual maps that guide an understanding of the world to integrate perceptions, needs, stimuli, impulses, and responses coming from the environment into categories that provide a basic organization that is opened to learning. Internal and external interpenetrate, as the dispositions of the external environment are reflected in new adaptive challenges for the internal dimension, and apprehensions of internal conditions affect relationships with the external environment. Furthermore, as Knox (2011) emphasizes, the growing differentiation between the internal and external dimensions, despite being tenuous in early life, is a primordial element for the progressive organization of the psyche.

From the emergence of conceptual maps or floating learning, the psychic field will be organized, constantly modified in relation to the world. The ego/consciousness pair is essential for the administration of internal and external adaptation needs, weaving together a coherent narrative and a sense of agency, as well as continuing the first movements of the structuring of the psyche, which initiated in a pre-egoic period.

## **The Development of the Ego and Consciousness**

In Aion, Jung emphasizes that "the rooting of the ego" (Jung, 1948/2013f, p. 46) in the realm of consciousness and an adequate adaptation which aims at strengthening it are fundamental. The ego is responsible for decision-making, choices, and free will, and constitutes our perception of individual consciousness.

The experience of “being” and having conscious of “being what we are” implies the existence of the ego, based on the continuity of identity and the preservation of personality, which, according to Fordham (1970), develops from a non-egoic center highly interactive with the environment. The advent of the ego would occur through successive sequences of deintegration and reintegration. In his words:

The stabilizing entity was at first the self only, but soon the ego contributes and ensures that the dynamic sequences in the self do not prove unproductive and circular, but are changed by ego activity which in turn increases its strength. Thus the structuring of the psyche is brought about to a significant extent by the ego. Without it only repetitive archetypal deintegrative reactions would exist, and these, though adaptive, would not lead to permanent interacting structures (Fordham, 1970, p. 100).

The protagonism of the ego in development is also observed by Knox (2011), reinforcing the fundamentally interactive aspect of development. According to the author, the ego arises from a growing sense of agency, action, or authorship over the world, as a capacity for intentionality in making choices, carrying out actions that generate results, exerting control over situations, and capable of provoking changes in the environment in which it is inserted. Self-agency is the result of the human capacity to feel capable of influencing its environment, both physical and relational, in which our actions have an effect and mobilize responses from those around us through an experience of action and consequence.

The bodily foundation of agency will provide the structuring of a symbolic and conceptual world, as well as of identity. This refers to a sense of oneself, woven around psychological characteristics and a social representation lived as belonging to the individual, as well as to the feeling of belonging and personal continuity. Such experiences are founded on bodily sensations, recognition of a body image, personal memories, goals, values, and experiences that are felt as one’s own. Identity develops initially from the body and bodily actions and is progressively defined by social and psychological exchanges with caregivers. It originates from the realization that both the individual and other humans are mental beings with emotions, beliefs, intentions, and thoughts (Meltzoff & Marshall, 2020). The satisfactory quality of early relationships will be determinant for an adequate affective regulation that, together with the caregiver’s reflective function, will contribute to the formation of a solid sense of identity and agency in the child (Knox, 2011).

The trajectory of self-agency, as described by Knox (2011), has as its fundamental characteristic the growing perception of oneself and one’s own power as an agent to meet needs or promote adaptations to the external and internal environment. It should be noted that the notion of the development of the trajectory of self-agency, theorized by the author, begins with physical agency, followed by social, teleological, intentional, representational, culminating in the establishment of an autobiographical self. The studies by Fonagy (2018) provide the neurofunctional basis of attachment theory which are essential to this understanding. The reach of autobiographical maturation allows memories to be organized and experienced personally; the individual represents themselves and becomes aware of their history. According to Teixeira, Silva, and Henriques (2018), identity is constructed in an imbricated way with the narrative that arises from the search for the internal coherence of being, emerging from established social relationships and the organism’s adaptive efforts regarding internal needs and external dispositions. The author adds that the ability to present oneself to the environment in a way that can be understood requires an autobiographical narrative that is coherent and at the service of adaptation.

Adopting a classic perspective, the notion of self-agency suggests an image and fantasy that can be related, in an amplification guise, to the hero symbol. Jung associated the heroic dynamism, expressed symbolically, with the confrontation of the structuring and adaptive dynamics of the first half of life. The sense of symbolic agency of the hero is what would express his strength: “it is a symbol that designates the child’s struggle to become a whole person” (Fillus, 2013, p. 38), aiming to achieve a satisfactory maturity to manage his inner and outer world.

An emerging and agent ego would present characteristics of a “child hero”, turning itself toward the challenges of childhood: the separation from mother and father, the facing of fears, confronting the unknown, creating autonomy, regulating their affects and impulses, asserting themselves in the world, reacting, defending themselves and dealing with unacceptable behaviors, as well as learning from each succession of tasks and tests (Fillus, 2013; Jacoby, 2019).

Considering the two characteristics of adaptation and their actualizations, it is concluded that individuality, a sense of agency, and a self-narrative with internal cohesion progressively broaden the individual’s consciousness of themselves and the world – initially expressed in fantasies, imagination, play, and the typical way of thinking of the child – providing more adaptive, conscious relationships and, in the future, less projective ones.

It should be considered that emerging difficulties in the relationship with others and with the environment can generate harmful consequences for the sense of agency and regulation between the internal and external dimensions. The importance of attachment relationships should also be highlighted, as essential to the formation of the ego and its sense of agency, elementary for satisfactory psychological development in which the integration of contents emerging from the unconscious and experiences of the external world is presumed. Therefore, problems in these relationships can harm the child’s development and strengthening of the ego, hindering the healthy maturation with the contents to be formed outside of consciousness.

The quality of relationships depends on secure attachment. This means that the way an individual interacts adaptively with their environment depends on the relationship patterns on which their affective life is built. Knox (1999) suggests that information acquired from early relationships with the world affects the individual, and the representations and affects associated with them are integrated into an emotional matrix formed in the first moments of life. It is even highlighted that parental projections onto the child and dysfunctional family relationships create impasses for adaptation, a fact observed by Jung (1909/2013e) when considering that maladaptation would have its source in the affective relationship with the parents. Therefore, adaptation to the first environment of childhood considers the nature of the parents and other circumstances, highlighting the unconscious maternal influences on the child as an indisputable factor of importance (Jung, 1920/2013a).

In addition to what has been mentioned, tragic, devastating, and traumatic experiences can render people defenseless and exposed to an indifferent environment, in which the comforting sensation of control over their own life is denied to them (Knox, 2011). Specifically, traumatic experiences (early trauma) and maltreatment suffered in childhood increase the risk of psychopathologies based on hypervigilance mechanisms against threats, difficulty in recognizing and understanding emotions, and low responsiveness to reward. They also affect adolescence, leading to conduct and oppositional defiant disorders, delinquency, antisocial behavior, self-injurious behavior, and suicide. In childhood, depressive, anxiety, stress disorders, and symptoms suggestive of trauma are common. The resulting picture can even involve psychotic symptoms and personality disorders (Jaffee, 2017). Broadly speaking, behavioral problems can hinder social development,

compromise protective and adaptative systems, thus making the individual more vulnerable to new similar situations and generating negative results in terms of the process of adulthood socialization (Hildebrand et al., 2019; Ben-David & Jonson-Reid, 2017).

To summarize, obstacles to satisfactory external and internal psychological adaptation stem from interference in the first relationships with caregivers, lack of secure attachment, dysfunctional relationship patterns in the family, tragic experiences carrying high traumatic power, neglect, deprivation, and physical, psychological, and sexual violence. Also noteworthy are the conditions of the organism as sources of impasses in adaptation, such as childhood illnesses or dysfunctions that require intense care, anomalies, and specific neurological conditions. Such situations can generate disorganizing emotional patterns recorded in implicit memory, revealing the interference of personal/parental unconscious contents and parental projections, which tend to cause the individual's alienation, cognitive debasement, dissociations, memory problems, vulnerability toward others, opposition, emotional dysregulation, excessive worry, fear, shame, guilt, horror, anxiety, depression, psychological trauma, high stress load, and other forms of psychopathology.

### **Relation Between Psychodynamic Notions of Adaptation and the Concept of Adaptive Functioning**

Having explored the notion of psychological adaptation understood as a balance between internal and environmental influences, it is necessary to complement this understanding of adaptability with the construct of adaptive functioning. The latter is a more restricted concept and can only be integrated into the notion of adaptability if understood as an aspect of it.

Regarding psychological adaptability, the definition proposed by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), reaffirmed in the latest version of the DSM-5, proposes that the term related to adaptation be "adaptive functioning", to consider conceptual, social, and practical skills (APA, 2014).

The conceptual domain involves competence in terms of memory, language, reading, writing, mathematical reasoning, acquisition of practical knowledge, problem-solving, and judgment in new situations, among others. The social domain involves perception of thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others, empathy, interpersonal communication skills, friendship skills, and social judgment. The practical domain involves learning and self-management in all life settings, including personal care, professional responsibilities, money management, recreation, behavioral self-control, and organization of school and professional tasks (APA, 2014, p. 37).

This concept has become the basis for developing understandings of children's adaptability, aiming to objectify which behaviors reflect more or less adaptive conduct. According to Barkley (2020), adaptive functioning in children is expressed in their ability to perform everyday activities that are required of them, both in academic settings and in variable contexts that involve socialization, including practical aspects of personal care, language and motor skills, independence, and social knowledge. Achenbach and Rescorla (2001) expand the concept, considering that adaptive functioning also reveals itself in good academic performance, in the capacity for applying effort to tasks, of behaving appropriately, and in learning, as well as in the degree of individual happiness in this context. In the authors' description, there is a proximity to the APA concept, with Achenbach standing out as the creator of the Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA - <https://aseba.org/>), which provides a comprehensive possibility for assessing adaptive and maladaptive functioning.



Following the pattern presented in this construct, adaptive functioning is impaired as behavioral problems arise, which, in turn, interfere with academic performance. Therefore, when behavioral problems are alleviated, academic performance may improve (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001; Barkley, 2020; Dias et al., 2017).

Under these considerations, presenting the domains proposed by the APA aims to provide a theoretical approach, seeking to establish connections with the construct of adaptive functioning. The psychodynamic contribution enables a processual understanding of development and assists in its perception and monitoring within the clinical and research contexts. It is noted that the proposed association is limited by the fact that it relates theories that have distinct foundations. Therefore, it should be considered a conceptual approximation, applicable to a broader psychodynamic perspective that can be supported by certain objective measures. In the upcoming section, the skills and/or domains of adaptive functioning will be described.

Given the emphasis on the relationship between self and the other as a fundamental factor in the constitution of the individual, the social domain that includes the perception of others' thoughts, feelings, and experiences, empathy, interpersonal communication skills, friendship skills, and social judgment is not limited to external adaptation but also encompasses internal adaptation. This relationship is suggested by equating this domain with the concept of social competence as a possible conceptual-descriptive approximation. Comodo and Dias (2017) note that in the study of the development of social skills in childhood, the criteria involving adaptability are correlated with social competence. According to Prette and Prette (2017), being socially competent means having the ability to achieve personal goals by articulating actions, feelings, and thoughts cohesively, meeting specific, social, and cultural demands, with favorable results for the individual and their relationships. These authors also highlight the effects on self-esteem and on the ethical-moral dimension. Conversely, social competence, as described by Sapienza and Bandeira (2018), includes self-worth skills (self-concept, self-awareness, self-esteem, self-efficacy). Therefore, it cannot be restricted to externally manifested behaviors. Given that the internal world relies on intersubjectivity to be developed, one can conjecture that the inverse relationship is equally true: legitimate success in adaptive behaviors in the social domain takes the personal and internal structuring of the individual into account. In other words, the internal processes of the individual may be reflected in the external aspects of the social domain, since social competencies, as a result of the operationalization of this domain, require internal resources to establish an appropriate relationship with others and/or the environment. This is a fundamental condition for an authentic relational pattern, in which the self and the other are considered and not confused in projective webs, requiring a mental separation between the self and the other and providing the self with the ability to not depend exclusively on the direct impact caused on the other or the environment to confirm its power of agency.

Ego agency, defined as the ability to influence the physical or relational environment and strengthen the ego by rooting it in consciousness, is essential for adaptation. An ego with satisfactory organization needs to manage itself. The characteristics encompassed in the practical domain include self-management in all life scenarios: personal care, responsibilities, behavioral self-control, and organization of school tasks. Self-management requires making choices that generate results and progressively express real power over the external world, resulting in a more mature, conscious, and reflective ego.

The conceptual domain permeates egoic relational and practical actions. The ego is a processor of experiences, requiring cognitive aspects that involve competencies in terms of memory, language, reading, writing, mathematical reasoning, acquisition of practical knowledge,

problem-solving, and judgment in new situations, among others. Since Binet, reasoning, judgment, memory, and abstraction functions have been considered components of intelligence, and adaptively integrating these factors produces solutions for various problems. Piaget, in turn, emphasizes intelligence as a form of biological adaptation to the external world (Campos et al., 2019).

Cabas-Hoyos et al. (2017), when discussing intelligence, present the notions of crystallized and fluid intelligence, highlighting that the former depends on the environment, as it is understood as knowledge acquired due to exposure to culture and education. The latter is nonverbal, independent of culture, and of specific instruction. Both lead the subject to develop satisfactory adaptation in their interaction with the environment.

The understanding of intelligence is not separated from the study of personality. Aspects related to the family environment also influence security and well-being, and the affection transmitted by parents are elements that predispose to good intelligence development. Thus, intellectual performance is directly affected by emotional states (Campos et al., 2019, Cabas-Hoyos et al., 2017).

To summarize, from the association of psychodynamic propositions with the construct of adaptive functioning, it can be inferred that the objective expression of signals, skills, and actions of adaptive functioning, in the internal dimension, can be understood regarding self-worth skills (self-concept, self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-efficacy), perception of security, sense of well-being, feelings, or typical reactions of the child. In the external dimension, manifest behaviors that involve social competence can be considered, such as perception of thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others, empathy, interpersonal communication skills, friendship skills, and social judgment. Regarding self-agency, the following aspects stand out: achieving goals, maintaining or improving the quality of relationships, maintaining or improving self-esteem, establishing an authentic relational pattern, self-management (personal care, responsibilities, behavioral self-control, and organization of school tasks), making choices, reflective capacity, cognitive aspects (memory, language, reading, writing, mathematical reasoning, acquisition of practical knowledge, problem-solving, judgment in new situations, and abstraction), crystallized and fluid intelligence. Factors indicating maladaptation and impairments in the development of agency capacity can be assessed by emotional instability, low self-confidence, cognitive problems, behavioral problems, stress, and other psychopathological conditions.

The possibility of measuring adaptive functioning, as described earlier, assists in the monitoring and assessment of children's adaptability during their development, and is feasible in the clinical and research context.

## Multidimensional Measurement

The following highlights possibilities of measurement, indicating types of instruments used and their relationship with the mentioned domains of adaptive functioning.

Instruments that assess stress, for example, may reveal how costly it is for the body to adapt to the external and internal environment. Although a normal reaction of the body, stress is understood here as a reaction to a stimulus that requires the body to make a greater effort to adapt, that is, to restore internal balance (Lipp, 2020). The author emphasizes that susceptibility to stress depends on the intensity and frequency of stressors, the internal (cognitive and emotional) evaluation of the stressor, how the individual receives social support, and strategies for coping with stress. Moreover, prolonged experiences of stress, when left untreated, trigger problems of adaptation,

school problems, and the appearance of diseases, given the link between emotional adversities experienced in childhood and emotional instability, low self-confidence, cognitive problems, and other psychopathological conditions (Lipp, 2020). Thus, the level of stress can be understood as a general measure of adaptation by considering the degree to which it has or has not taken a toll on the child to adapt to his or her external and internal environment and the fact that it traverses the domains of adaptive functioning expressed by the APA.

Instruments that assess intelligence would encompass the conceptual domain, spanning the social and practical aspects, measuring adaptation linked to cognitive factors. Adaptation includes the cognitive dimension (conceptual domain of adaptive functioning according to the APA, 2014), consisting of the ability to perform tasks required in academic settings, to demonstrate language skills, to achieve good academic performance, and to learn (Barkley, 2020; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). Measures of intelligence help to understand the interfering factor of emotions and cognitive performance. Traumatic experiences can generate cognitive impairment, difficulty in problem-solving, impaired integration of memories, impairments in verbal learning, short-term memory, declarative memory, sustained attention, visual construction, and executive functions (Oliveira et al., 2018; Cicchetti et al., 2018; Borges & Dell'Aglio, 2020).

Scales that evaluate internalizing and externalizing behaviors, psychological syndromes, and behavioral problems can reflect adaptive difficulties, given that the adaptive functioning of the child is impaired when there are behavioral problems (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001; Barkley, 2020). These behaviors may indicate difficulties in academic performance, thus encompassing all domains of adaptive functioning established by the APA (2014) as indicators of possible maladaptation.

In the clinical setting, the understanding arising from multidimensional perspectives helps identify signs of psychological distress, difficulties in achieving balance between internal and external dimensions, unfavorable conditions for developing the capacity for self-agency, and detection of psychopathological conditions, underpinning perspectives for treatment and prevention. In the field of research, it is conceivable that multidimensional measurement of psychological adaptation in children, utilizing the modalities of the aforementioned instruments, may assist in understanding the effectiveness of the proposed intervention, allowing for the identification of possible changes between pre- and post-intervention measures.

## Conclusion

The association of Jungian propositions with the concept of adaptive functioning can facilitate the measurement of an individual's degree of adaptability, a relevant measure in psychological evaluation processes and in research aimed at demonstrating the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions. It should be highlighted that the domains of adaptive functioning expressed in the APA definition are not watertight categories, as there are several points of intersection among them. Thus, variations need to be understood in conjunction in order to measure the quality of adaptation. Furthermore, in terms of psychological evaluation, one must consider, besides the choice and accuracy of the instruments adopted, the totality of the organism interacting with the environment, encompassing the child in its family, social, and cultural world.

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