

Global Focus on Knowledge 2008  
“Challenging the Mind”

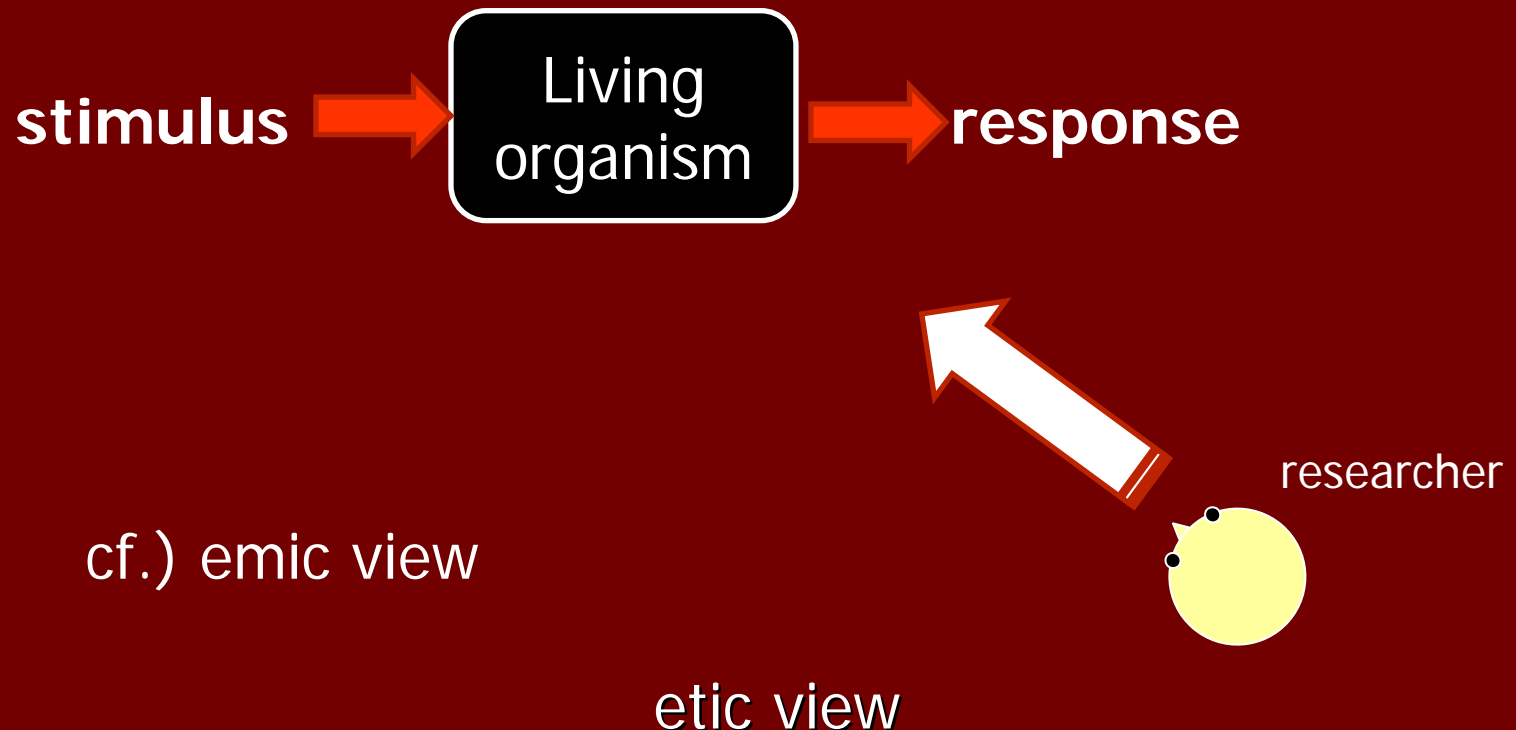
# Listening to life stories

Graduate School of Education  
Department of Clinical Psychology  
Nochi Masahiro

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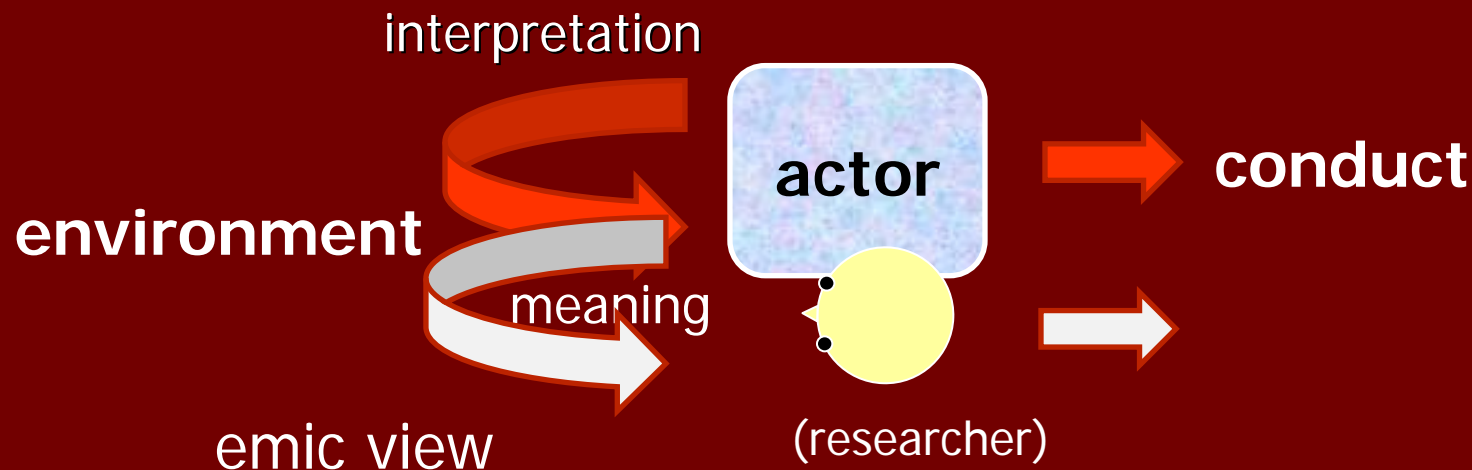
# A way of understanding human beings

- Psychology as a branch of science
  - understanding the relationship between stimulus and response -



# A way of understanding human beings

- In their daily lives/in clinical practice trying to understand the client not only objectively but also in the depth of his/her mind, valuing his/her own interpretation.



# What does it mean to "interpret"?

- A basic pattern of interpretation

regard

**A**

as

**B**



⟨A watch⟩

⟨An expensive accessory⟩

+ ⟨a personal treasure⟩

# What is a “life story”?

## ■ Life

= a span of time when someone is alive  
how one's life is lived  
all living things, etc.

## ■ Life story

A fabric composed of words that reflect one's life  
and give it meaning

## ■ A Story

- has concrete concepts
- creates connections between these concepts
- has integrity and coherence

# The role of a “life story”

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due to copyright restrictions

# The role played by a “life story”

- ¶ The words Sen (Chihiro) spoke to Haku  
“I heard about a dwelling reclaimed from the river.

The river, now I remember, is the Kohaku. So your true name is Kohaku”.

The meaning of being given a name

- Situating - the river Kohaku
- The history of the river (its connection to Chihiro)
  - A story is given, and with it an  
*identity*

# Identity has a story

- identity

who I am, in what sense am I what I am

- Bases of identity conveyed by a story

something experienced in the present and in the past that contains a promise for the future

- A story told by others

- Loss of a life story can lead to an identity crisis



# Life story studies

## ■ A general definition

Life story studies – in this field of study the content and role of stories assigned to one's life are analyzed qualitatively, especially based on a person's own narratives.

## ■ Topics in life story studies

What features are common to peoples' life stories?

Under what circumstances does a life story fall into crisis?

How does a life story recover from crisis?

# Brain injury

- Brain Injury: brain damage caused by external impact

= traffic accidents, sports accidents, injury inflicted by a criminal act, etc.

- The main symptoms

- physical symptoms
- disturbance of higher cerebral function

{  
memory impairment  
attention deficit  
inability to plan  
loss of emotional control

# Case “life stories of those with brain injury”

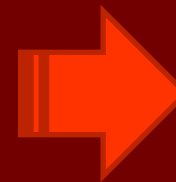
## ■ Participants (male 8, female 2)

- 24~54 years old, 3~28 years after an injury
- 8 persons injured in traffic accidents, 1 in a fall, 1 in a sports accident.
- All have subjective symptoms of brain injury yet maintain their linguistic abilities
- All left their hospitals more than a year ago and live in their communities.

## ■ Method

Observation records kept on daily scenes

2-3 Semi-structured interviews of 30~60 minutes



**Qualitative  
analysis**

# Awareness of the image of “Abnormality”

- Being cautious about the term “TBI” (traumatic brain injury)

I don't like the term, “TBI”, because it makes me feel branded. Its meaning is known – people tend to judge all people with TBI based on this label....I have TBI. That alone could force me to give up understanding myself more deeply. (Male 30s)

“brain damage” is accompanied by the following misperceptions → “foolish”, “crazy” = “abnormal”

# How to cope with the perception of “abnormality”

- Distinguishing between those who suffered some brain damage and the “Retarded” or “Mentally ill”

(Though he says hello to everybody that he meets,) he behaves totally differently from those who are retarded or mentally ill. He acts logically. Though he acts strangely, he never expresses an emotion that we can't understand. (Male 40s)

- try to distinguish brain damage from “retarded”, “mentally ill”

# How to cope with the perception of being “disabled”

## ■ Puzzlement about “Disabled”

I hate to use the word (disabled) as an excuse for being unable to do something. It's important to distinguish what we can do from what we can't do. It's not my way to blame this on my handicap.  
(male 40s)

“disabled”

→ Some people use the words “disabled” or “weak” to get pension benefits.

# A Paradoxical consequence of positive words

- “MTBI” (mild traumatic brain injury)

It's not “mild” at all. It's destructive. That label has ruined my entire life. (Female 50s)

People neglect the difficulties posed by narrators

A consequence of being almost “Normal” is the exclusion from various services

# A paradoxical consequence of positive words

- From almost "Normal"

To "stupid", "lazy"

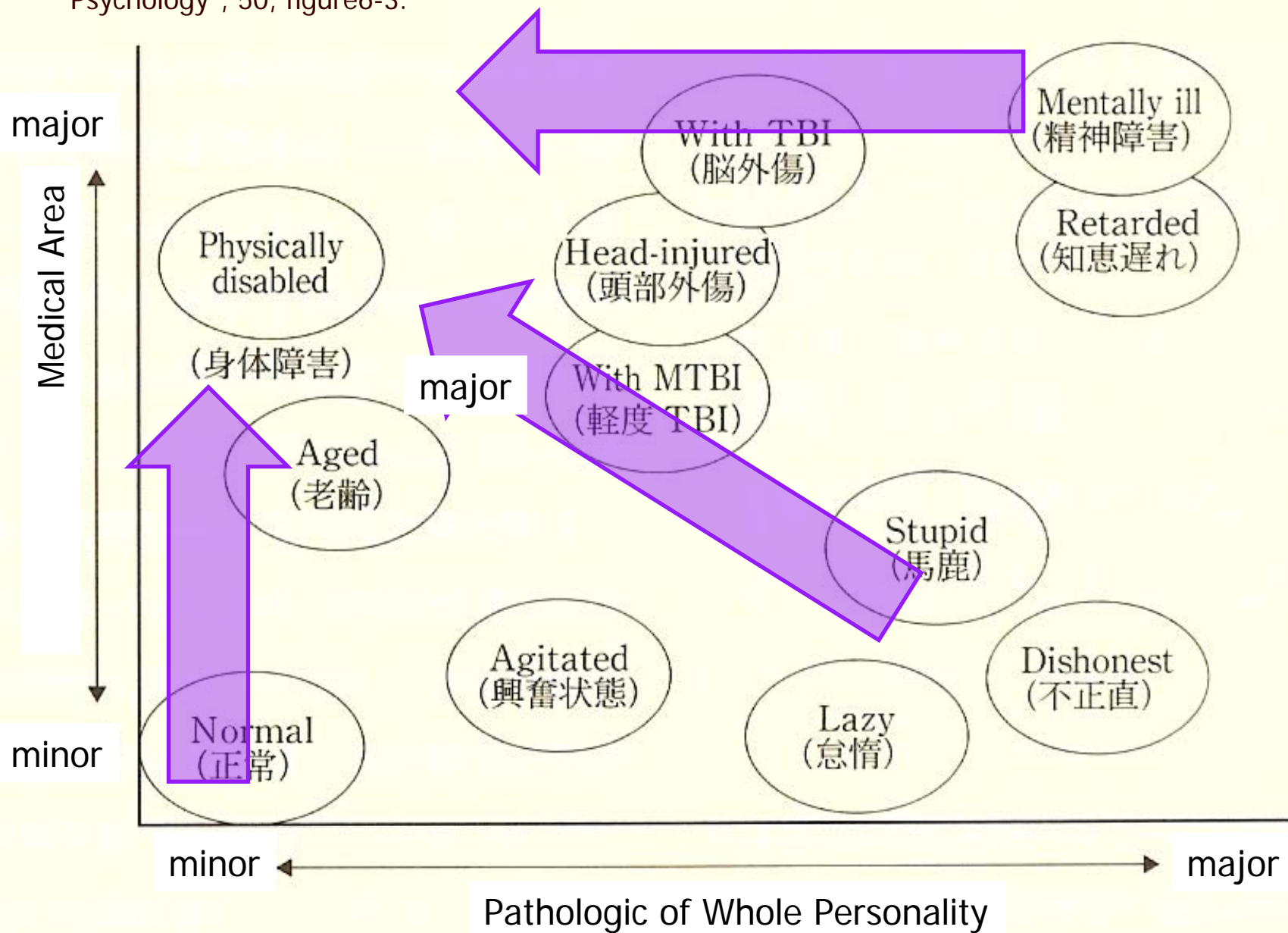
(These words do not connote a handicap, but give a negative impression of personality)

I am fed up with the fight against those who regard me as "stupid" . One day a colleague of mine came to my office and said to me "Haven't you found the answer to that problem yet?" .

In fact, I haven't. I have just begun to prepare myself for that problem. (Female 40s)



‡:Youko Yamada, Tatuya SATO, Hirohumi Minami eds.,2001, "Catalog; the scene of the Psychology", 50, figure6-3.



# The significance of life story studies on handicapped people

- They can contribute to clinical practices such as rehabilitation

A model useful for understanding people with the same handicap

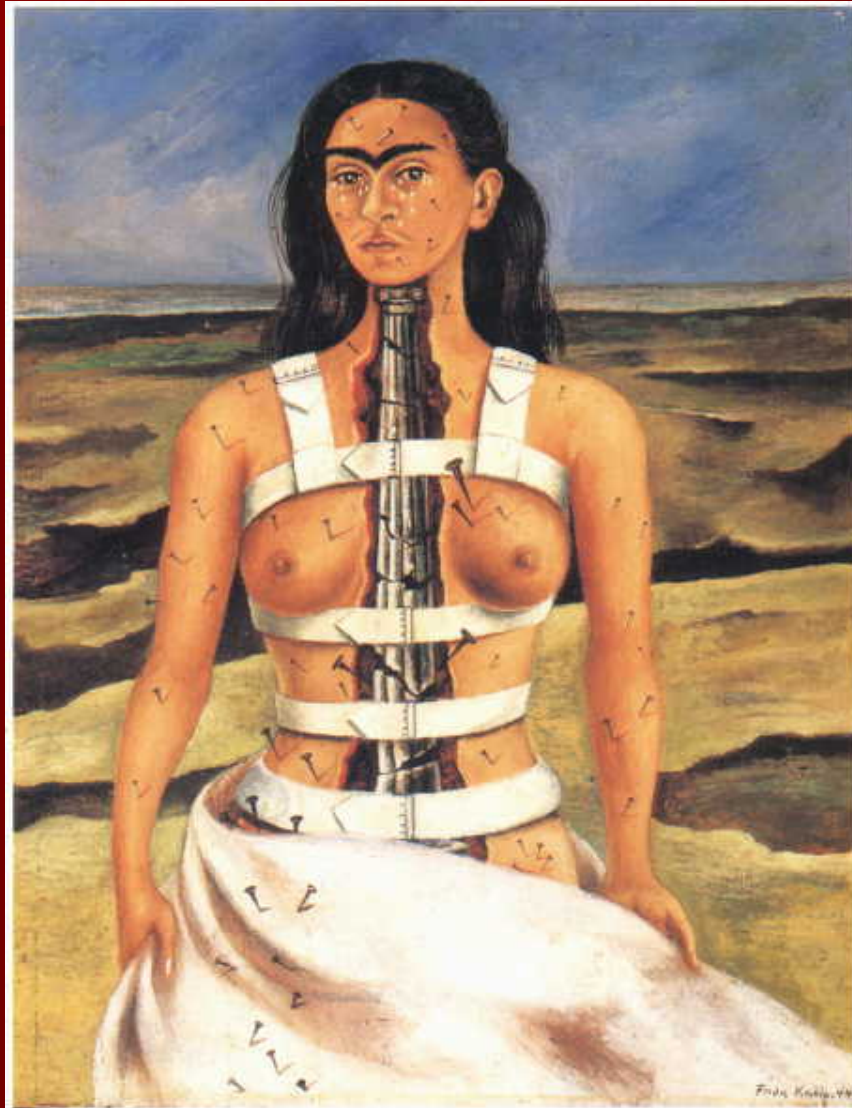
=> more finely-tuned services

- They can be a foundation of sympathy toward the handicapped

Understand the handicapped as people like ourselves

Lead to investigation of more universal aspects of what it is to be human

# ♀ Life story in a picture



**Frida Kahlo**  
**"The broken column"**

# Life story in a picture

