

This paper was published in the Year Book 2012 of the Adlerian Society (UK) and the Institute for Individual Psychology, celebrating 100 years of Individual Psychology 1911-2011

THEORY OF TREATMENT ¹

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In my contribution to the theme “Recent Developments in Individual Psychology Psychotherapy”, I shall focus on the theory of treatment.

Life Style as the Treatment Method

In my therapy, I use Adler’s specific dynamic, the (unconscious) Life Style, as the treatment method. At the International Congress of Individual Psychology in Turin in 2005, Andrea Ferrero raised the question of whether Adlerian Psychotherapy is dynamic or not. Today it is time to add that Adlerian psychotherapy is also relational, Kleinian, self-psychological and much more, provided that the focus is maintained upon a specific Adlerian dynamic is focused on.

I would like to say a few words about the Relational Psychoanalysis introduced by Stephen Mitchell (1999). Adler’s attitude regarding the equal value of every person is an essential pre-condition for the relational perspective.

In my view, the central concept of the relational perspective is the moment of meeting, a concept created by Daniel Stern (2005). This concept describes the moment in therapy,–when

¹ Contribution to the theme “*Recent Developments in Individual Psychology Psychotherapy*” at the International Congress of Individual Psychology in Vienna, 14-17 July 2011.

two human beings really meet each other, spontaneously, unpredictably, without any means to hide themselves for protection. Clients with severe disorders uncannily tend to track down the vulnerability of the therapist, so that both of them are equally affected. The moment of meeting leads to strong emotions and eventually to a renewed feeling of togetherness and of community.

The second central concept of a relational perspective, in my view, is Adler's dynamic principle of Life Style. With a Life Style analysis, I have a point of reference to which both members of the interaction can refer. The point of reference is not the supposed knowledge of the Life Style, but lies in the mutual search for understanding the (still) unconscious Life Style.

In therapy, one may refer to the momentous process of transference and countertransference, to the predominant motivation or to the reconstruction of traumatic influences in childhood. Adler's Life Style concept embraces all these phenomena. In a therapeutic situation, two lifestyles confront each other, the Life Style of the client and that of the therapist. The typical circular pattern of Life Style movements can overlap or even lead to an intertwining process which is known as "enactment" and which must be analysed afterwards. Since all life movements are concentrated in the Life Style, this concept represents the triangulating third as a point of reference, leading out of the dyadic relationship.

What does all this mean in terms of my treatment method? In my therapeutic co-movement, I pay attention to the three essential elements of Life Style: inferiority feeling, compensation and goal. As a consequence, I look for the feelings that can give evidence of an early trauma or deficiency, that is, feelings that belong to the position of inferiority deriving from traumatic experiences, especially anxiety and the

feeling of being helpless and powerless. In addition, I pay attention to the client's expression of his or her final goal: visions of the personality he or she strives to become in order to survive in this inimical world. I also look for compensatory strategies. If the focus is on the trauma, often the specific coping mechanism of the client is overlooked, i.e., how he or she has been reacting to the traumatic experiences in his or her life and tried to compensate for them.

Adler's main concern was the Life Style analysis because, in human life, he also saw the effect of another dynamic, i.e., that of the creative power that can be engaged in the service of dominance or in the service of community feeling. This dynamic manifests itself when a neurotically frozen Life Style dissolves into a feeling of togetherness and of community.

Life Style Analysis, Supplemented by Psychoanalytic Concepts

Life Style analysis may be supplemented by some psychoanalytic concepts and neurobiological and other empirical research results. Here are three examples: mentalisation, transference and the archaic introject.

Mentalisation: According to Adler, the infant evaluates and processes its environment during the first three to five years. Peter Fonagy (2002) has investigated this process of mentalisation in detail. Gerd Rudolf (2004) has studied the structural functions necessary for mentalisation. Structural disorders occur if these structures are not fully developed. Both authors have also used the results of recent infant research.

By including all these findings we, Individual Psychology Therapists, can supplement Adler's term of evaluation with the rich variety of results of the latest research without giving up Adler's Life Style concept as a structuring holistic principle of

our thinking. When Fonagy and Rudolf describe the development of mentalisation leading to a functioning self-structure, they hold a biological-medical view. Adler saw the human being as an artist who is constantly creating himself or herself. This perspective of life as a creative process or movement does not allow well-defined theoretical terms, only descriptions of the momentous state of a fluid process.

Transference: The Life Style is developed within the primary family relationships, such as the relation of the infant to the mother and to the father as well as siblings. The infant organises its Life Style depending on how the family figures are experienced and on how much he or she suffers from trauma or deprivation. What we call the character of a person is just a very rigid form of Life Style. The experiences in primary family relationships shape the Life Style; they are internalised and integrated as representations in the implicit memory and are unconsciously acted out throughout the whole life. This means that the concept of transference lies at the centre of Adler's concept of Life Style development. Adler's concept offers two advantages over the usual analysis of transference: Life Style contains and collects the traumatising elements of each relationship, focusing on these experiences like a laser beam on its extreme point; this is why we do not need to differentiate between special transferences (positive or negative). Furthermore, the compensating strategies, which tend to be overlooked, take priority over traumatic experiences. These compensating strategies contain the creative power of the client, making therapeutic change possible.

When I emphasise the special feature of Adler's dynamic, I assume that the psychoanalytic literature about transference and countertransference is known and can be consulted if it appears to be necessary.

The “biased apperception” of the “inimical world” as a result of introjection:

There is one psychoanalytic term I have always found to be missing in Adler’s dynamic: the *archaic introject*. Adler does not use the term “introject” but in my view, his notion of the “inimical world” of the neurotic represents the archaic introject, since the “biased apperception” of an “inimical world” is the result of introjection. In severe disorders, specific transferences cannot be differentiated any longer; the whole world seems to be “full of enemies”. This is because, at a very early time of life, mother and father represent the “whole world” to the infant. In therapy, we have to deal with this introjected inimical world, that is, with this archaic introject. Severe disorders present very rigid Life Styles, where an archaic introject may even become an inner figure like a persecutor in (unconscious) fantasy. The client may identify with such a hateful and sadistic introject, or he or she puts himself or herself in the position of a tormented victim. These positions may also change at any moment. In this case, the Life Style seems to be nothing but an extraordinary safeguarding mechanism, built only to avoid the traumatic experience; containing neither a vision nor a goal of how to live in this world, just an unconscious longing for rescue.

There are innumerable valuable concepts for treatment; theoretically, they may seem to contradict themselves, but nevertheless, they may still be helpful for the individual client. In this respect, Adler’s Life Style principle allows us to use all concepts which may help us to understand the client in the therapeutic situation. In the theory of treatment, there ~~is~~ may be controversy regarding whether psychodynamic descriptions may be eclectic or theoretically consistent. One could say that I use psychoanalytic concepts in an eclectic way, but the principle of my choice is the consistent concept of the Life Style. This Adlerian dynamic provides a guideline to facilitate the organisation of a variety of phenomena. Furthermore, it

helps to remind oneself of the essential questions: what does life mean to this individual client, what is his or her neurotic effort and what is he or she actually looking and longing for? What fills the patient with inner joy and makes his or her life meaningful?

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