Individual Psychology for an Online World: Implementation of an
Adlerian Focused Web Based Learning Community

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The best is yet to come.
Abstract

This paper describes the theoretical and practical foundations for and the initial implementation of a Web based learning community focused on the individual psychology of Alfred Adler its relevancy in an online world. This author’s motivation for creating the learning community (which is termed Adler ETC.) is discussed. A case study of the role that Adler ETC. could play to facilitate sharing information about best practice in online instruction is briefly described. The case study includes a discussion of some individual psychology concepts that have informed this author’s practice of instruction. The implementation path followed to establish Adler ETC. is discussed, including (a) brief technical notes, (b) initial content made available in Adler ETC., and (c) facilitation of the growth of a cyberculture of which Adler ETC. is a component. Steps taken to publicize the learning community and the results obtained are detailed. This author concludes that Adler ETC. is a potentially useful tool for promoting knowledge and practice of individual psychology in online contexts and specifies additional steps that should be taken to increase the visibility and member perception of the value of Adler ETC.
Individual Psychology for an Online World: Implementation of an Adlerian Focused Web Based Learning Community

This paper describes the foundation for and the initial implementation of a Web based learning community. The learning community members are interested in the individual psychology of Alfred Adler and, given the primacy of the concept of social interest in Adler’s world view (Dreikurs, 1989), have questions and ideas about its relevancy in a world where interpersonal relationships are increasingly experienced in media loci such as the Internet, rather than face to face. Here are some examples of questions which might emerge.

- How do we experience friends in an online world?
- How is emotional intimacy developed in online media?
- How are work relationships different for online workers?
- How does media based interaction and feedback affect the development of self?
- How does the Internet affect our sense of psychological nearness and alienation?

The learning community project was conceived of and initiated as part of a program for the degree of Master of Arts in Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy at Adler Graduate School, Richfield, Minnesota. The term *initiated* is used purposefully in order to make clear that like any healthy community, this one is expected to grow and change over time. What exists as of this writing should be considered a beginning rather than an accomplished feat.

This project used technology, but is not about technology. As Marshall McLuhan stated, “…the personal and social consequences of any medium - that is, of any extension of ourselves - result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by
any new technology” (McLuhan, 1994, p. 7). The learning community is concerned with the consequences of the emergence of an online world more so than in the technologies behind it.

What is a Web Based Learning Community?

The term *learning community* has many alternative definitions as noted by Ke and Hoadley (2009) in their literature review. For the purposes of this project, it was defined as a social group whose members have a shared desire to learn, some common learning goals, and a degree of emotional connectedness. The members of the social group interact both with each other and with subject matter. When these interactions are mediated by some sort of Web facility, the social group becomes a Web based learning community and thus a limited case of what Bell (2007) referred to in a general sense as cyberspace and cyberculture:

Cyberculture … refers here to ways of life in cyberspace, or ways of life shaped by cyberspace, where cyberspace is a matrix of embedded practices and representations…[T]hinking about cyberculture involves thinking about representations, meanings, images; about the ways in which we assemble particular narratives about how these new technologies have changed, are changing, or will change our lives. (p. 5-6)

The transactional processes and symbol sets of the Web are a cyberspace. The shared experiences, meanings and values of the members of the Web based learning community are a cyberculture.

Now that the general nature of the project has been explained, the reasons why this effort was undertaken will be presented.

Justification for Project

This author was previously trained in educational psychology and now in the fundamentals of Adlerian individual psychology and therapy, and is experienced in adult
education as a college instructor in both face to face and online classrooms. This is the background from which this project was approached. Of course, there are countless other perspectives which members of the learning community will bring to the discourse.

**Motivations for Undertaking the Project**

Certainly this author’s desire to complete the Adler program is a strongly felt striving. That goal, while important, is completely time-boxed. A more enduring objective springs from this author’s role as an online instructor. In that role this author has been present when many students shared their thoughts, wants, and feelings and has heard them voice their perceptions about the difficulties they face as online learners. Most of them have grown in spite of their fears when they approached their situations with courage. This author believes that some of his significance comes from facilitating students’ growth by the attitude and practice of encouragement. That is one way for him to demonstrate social interest.

A book is not only a repository of information. Assuming the author’s intent is in some way to benefit the social group, it also is an instrument through which social interest is manifested. The learning community initiated by this project is superficially different from a book but has the same fundamental goal as an expression of social interest.

A case study of how some of the concepts of individual psychology apply in the context of online learning will next be briefly described. The case study demonstrates benefits that online instructors would realize from belonging to a learning community in which individual psychology could be explored with colleagues.

**Case Study: First Course**

This author teaches an online college course (FirstCourse) which all students take as the first course in their master’s programs. While there is significant course content in critical
thinking and academic writing, the primary content of the course could arguably be described as encouragement.

Over a period of about six years this author has had the opportunity to interact with approximately 2,000 students in FirstCourse and to observe their assertions about their experiences. These observations have provided a wealth of data which, while anecdotal in nature, has productively informed this author’s teaching practice. Some of those observations will next be shared.

**Trust Only Movement**

As Dreikurs (1989) stated, an individual’s actions are the surest expressions of that individual’s personality. Therefore movement is the true indicator of growth. By comparing student self reports of their emotions and beliefs upon beginning the course with their self reports at the end of the course, some conclusions can be made about the students’ movement during the course.

**Entry assertions.** The following list of emotions and beliefs was compiled from student statements at the beginning of their online learning experiences. The list is representative but not exhaustive. It is this author’s anecdotal experience that more than half of the students initially express at least one of these emotions and beliefs:

- stress, anxiety and apprehension, either generalized or specific to a situation in that student’s life;
- fear of the unknown related either to beginning graduate school or beginning online learning;
- fear of feeling isolated;
- fear of lacking social cues;
individually overwhelmed;

- intimidated;

- self doubting;

- skeptical of the value of online learning, either to the student personally or to prospective employers;

- belief that help and timely answers to questions would not be available; and

- time management concerns.

Several interesting comments are engendered by the above list. First, it points to apparent paradoxes. For one, it is likely that students in face-to-face classes have many of these same concerns, yet at least in this author’s classroom experience, there are fewer open utterances of them. This is possibly due to the inhibiting presence of other students in the physical classroom. In spite of the freedom with which these feelings are expressed, online students often initially state that they feel more, not less, isolated and feel that the online courseroom is not an intimate place.

Another paradox is that students often fear that timely help will not be available to them. In reality, given the interactive tools available to facilitate dialogue, it is likely that instructor assistance is more readily available for online students than for classroom students. This assumes equally motivated instructors, of course.

As for time management, most of the students interacted with have had responsible jobs or family roles, and have been successful at managing the conflicting demands placed upon them. While point-in-time crises may be exceptions, there is no reason why the same time management skills would not generalize to the online courseroom. In reality the problem seems
to be one of procrastination. As Brownlow and Reasinger (2000) found, procrastination is common among college students and is related to perfectionism and fear of failure.

**Exit assertions.** “I have prevailed!” was the triumphant exclamation of one recent student. The feeling of control and empowerment in that statement was evident and gratifying. As with the previous list of entry assertions, it is this author’s anecdotal experience that more than half of the students express at least one of the following emotions and beliefs at the end of FirstCourse:

- felt more, not less, intimacy in online course;
- encouraged by classmates and instructor;
- pleased by progress; and
- excited about future goals and opportunities.

The differences between these two sets of assertions clearly represent movement from a felt negative to a felt positive state. There are relevant principles of individual psychology that help explain that movement, as follows.

**Context of growth.** It is impossible to understand a person outside the context of that person’s social situation (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). This is one of the strongest assertions of individual psychology. For students in FirstCourse, as well as in other online learning situations, there are important variables that make up that context. What follows are some of those variables.

**Social cues.** Bolton and Bolton (1996) delineated four basic social styles that describe how people behave in interpersonal interactions. According to Bolton and Bolton, each individual possesses one of the following social styles:

- driving,
assertive,
• amiable, or
• analytical.

For each style the authors specified both normal, that is, unstressed typical behaviors and also backup behaviors that people exhibit when they are under stress. There are other personality models that convey similar ideas. The key point is that based on this author’s experience, when people are interacting online they are under stress much of the time, if only because they lack many of the cues that are present in face to face interaction. Through years of experience with face to face social interactions, most of us have learned at least to some degree to read behavioral cues from other individuals and to adapt our own behavior to the behavioral styles indicated by those cues. We have relatively little practice doing so in an online environment, yet establishing and maintaining healthy relationships depends in part on that ability.

**Social presence.** Kehrwald (2010) defined online social presence as the extent to which individuals (a) can project themselves as social entities in the environment, (b) can experience the presence of others, and (c) feel connected to each other as members of a group. Gunawardena and Zittle (as cited in Cobb, 2011) in turn found that social presence is positively correlated to overall student satisfaction and perception of learning.

**Identity formation.** Our identity is that self knowledge by which we define ourselves, recognize ourselves as distinct from others, and determine our membership in groups (Rimskii, 2011). As such our identity plays a key part in our role-based behavior and in how we interact with others. In a traditional classroom we can relatively easily establish our identity as students. It is less easy to do so online where we do not experience the protocols and physical trappings of school. Add to this the fact that on the Internet, we can be whoever we want to be. It takes
many online students a period of time to establish their identities as students and there is often a period of anxiety while that is occurring.

**Life tasks.** The introduction to this paper has a list of five example questions that are of interest in the context of the online world and which would be natural to pursue in the learning community. These questions were not chosen at random; in fact, they correspond to the five Adler/Mosak life tasks (Oberst & Stewart, 2003; Dreikurs & Mosak, 1967; Mosak & Dreikurs, 2000):

- work,
- love,
- community,
- self, and
- spirituality.

Healthy adaptation to life depends on our performance of these tasks. We have primarily learned our manner of dealing with these tasks in a face to face world and now must address them in the context of an online world as well.

Having looked at the context of growth, this author will now briefly present some comments on how many FirstCourse students have been aided in achieving that growth.

**Facilitation of growth.** Individual psychology provides a number of powerful tools by which instructors can promote positive movement in students. Here are some of them.

**Encouragement.** Properly performed, encouragement is probably the single most valuable tool. To be effective, encouragement must be real. Vague statements along the lines of “you can do it” aren’t profitable; they tend to produce responses like “I know myself, and I think I can’t do it. You don’t know anything about me; what makes you think I can?” However,
pointing out ways in which the student has been successful in similar situations in the past often works wonders.

**Instructor presence.** When students perceive the instructor as present in the course, they feel cared for and significant as a result.

**Open expression.** By encouraging open, respectful expression of ideas and feelings, instructors can promote a sense of belonging to the group. This feeling can be further enhanced by appropriate self disclosure on the part of the instructor.

**Risk taking.** The best way to help students overcome their fear of failure is to encourage them to try. Then when they fail, as they are bound to do from time to time, help them realize that they have the creative resources to turn that failure into successful outcomes.

In conclusion, the case study shows that there is a body of expertise learned through experience that could benefit other instructors if it were available to them. This small example helps illustrate the potential value of a learning community. What follows is a description of how a project to establish a representative learning community has been approached.

**Implementation Strategy**

Implementation of the learning community involves two main groups of tasks. The first, complete as of the time of this writing, was the creation of a prototype Web based cyberspace in which the learning community (hereinafter referred to as Adler ETC.) resides. The second task is to enable and encourage the cyberculture which is the learning community to form. The latter task is the less structured and more complex of the two, and in reality does not have a fixed ending date.
Defining the Cyberspace

As previously noted, the cyberspace is the set of transactional tools and symbol sets that connects members within the learning community, both with each other and with external resources. For this project, this purpose was served by implementing a simple blog.

Blog defined. The term blog is a contraction of the words Web log. A blog is a type of Web site on which one or more authors post commentaries, informative articles, notification of events, and so forth. Generally, readers are enabled to respond with comments about the blog posts, and many blogs provide message systems, helpful links to other resources, archives of information, and so forth.

Originally most blogs were used informally by their authors to post personal information. However, blogs have become an increasingly common part of the formal communication strategy of organizations. As of this writing, there were over 162 million blogs established on the Web, with over 1 million posts per day (BlogPulse, n.d.)

Blogs have been deployed for a myriad of purposes, for example,

- nursing best practice information (Price, 2010);
- social studies education (Frye, Trathen, & Koppenhaver, 2010);
- pharmacist best practice information (Clauson, Elkins, & Goncz, 2010);
- news dissemination and commentary (Hargrove & Stempel, 2007);
- political discourse (Coleman, 2008); and, of course, their original purpose as personal diaries and life narratives (Hollenbaugh, 2011).

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, this project was not about technology. This author is by no means a technical expert nor does he have a goal to become one. Consequently limitations of the technical skill set of this author were a factor in choosing a way
of implementing Adler ETC. Of course, readers of this paper or members of the Adler ETC. community may have different interests. Therefore, a few technical details about the project are included next.

**Technical notes.** Adler ETC. was implemented using Blogger™, a free blog authoring tool and hosting environment provided by Google Corporation. The authoring tool provides most, but not all, of the editing features needed to prepare blog posts in APA format. It is a labor and detail intensive process to translate back and forth between APA-formatted documents and a format that Blogger is able to understand. For that reason, hard copies of the initial posts for Adler ETC. were not maintained in strict APA format, though all required content information was included. This was a reasonable compromise given that use of the Blogger tool has no associated fees. Also, it is not necessarily the case that type fonts and sizes which are optimized for reading comprehension in paper-based documents are also optimum for online presentations. This is relevant because APA format standards have in the main been developed before the advent of online technology and have not undergone revision to adapt.

Access to Adler ETC. was made available to anyone for the purpose of reading content and making comments on the posts. This author allowed only himself the right to make posts. He did, however, make it clear that the writings of others would be welcome and full authorship credit would be given to guest authors.

As of this writing, Adler ETC. is hosted at [http://www.adleretc.blogspot.com/](http://www.adleretc.blogspot.com/).

Computer system requirements for using Blogger are minimal. Blogger supports various devices in addition to computers, such as mobile phones, and multimedia features such as video, audio and podcasts. Blogs created with Blogger can utilize site feeds, which are a means of linking blogs together to automatically communicate content updates.
As noted earlier in this paper, at the time of this writing Adler ETC. is a prototype. That means a number of decisions had to be made about what to include in scope of the implementation. A summary of those decisions follows.

**Initial Adler ETC. Content**

There are many tools that could be implemented within Adler ETC. to support the functions of the learning community. For example, much could be done with video conferencing that would allow members to carry on real-time dialogues. Lists of helpful resources could be maintained for member reference. A messaging facility could be provided that would allow members to initiate and carry on discussions. Implementation of any one of these or similar facilities would have been straightforward. However, the scope of this project was limited and therefore decisions had to be made about the initial scale of Adler ETC.

As a result, Adler ETC. was implemented with a set of initial posts that were organized into three categories as will be described shortly. These categories and topics were chosen on the basis of their contributions to a basic understanding of the task of implementing an Adlerian focused Web based learning community. There are, of course, a great many other concepts involved in individual psychology.

Content of each initial post is contained in the Appendices to this paper.

**Foundations category.** The foundations category addressed certain core ideas within individual psychology that give a basic grounding in Adlerian thought that seemed most relevant to the learning community. Because these ideas are foundational, only moderate growth in the number of topics is expected. The topics are:

- What is individual psychology?
- Ten central assertions of individual psychology.
• Social interest.
• Private logic.
• Function of memory.
• Courage.
• Life tasks.

**History category.** These topics are intended to convey information about the historical context of individual psychology. Again, only moderate growth is expected in this category. Initially, the two posts included brief biographical sketches of two preeminent figures in individual psychology.

• Alfred Adler.
• Rudolf Dreikurs.

**Applications category.** This category is where the most growth is expected, because it contains information about how individual psychology can be applied to life situations. One initial post was made: *Adlerian brief therapy training program: Distance learning example.*

As an aside, to write what is even a modest Adlerian primer is an audacious undertaking and one that requires a certain amount of courage, as well as significant effort. For example, it would probably be easier to write one hundred pages about Adler than one hundred words. In the case of Adler, enough details of his life were included to give a hint of the concepts of birth order, organ inferiority, and striving for significance.

In summary, to this point the well defined tasks involved in implementing Adler ETC., have been discussed, namely: (a) selection and configuration of a software environment, and (b) the loading of that environment with some content items. Next the approach taken to the less well defined portion of the project, which is the establishment of a culture, will be presented.
Formation of Cyberculture

As previously noted, the shared experiences, meanings and values of the members of the Web based learning community make up a cyberculture. In comparison with the cyberspace, the cyberculture is self defining and self organizing, and its development is less predictable. Cyberspace is built, but a cyberculture grows. There are two major factors that will affect that growth: (a) member perception of value, and (b) efforts made to publicize Adler ETC. so that potential members of the existence of the learning community. Each factor is discussed below.

Member perception of value. As anyone who has had experience with some form of newsletter will likely attest, it is relatively easy to influence people to read newsletters but difficult to influence them to contribute. Blog authors face a similar challenge.

Seok In, Jeakyoung and Sooyeon (2009) found a number of factors that influence one’s intention to use a blog:

- usefulness;
- perceived ease of use;
- reciprocity, that is, the degree to which one who has provided resources will receive resources in return; and
- social identity, that is, the degree to which one perceives oneself to be a member of a group.

The first two factors are not surprising. Reciprocity can be addressed by such means as ensuring that when a member posts a comment or makes a request for information, a substantive response is provided. Also, it is important to publicly acknowledge those who contribute to the community. Social identity is to some degree inherent in the concept of Adler ETC. by virtue of
the community organizing around a common interest in individual psychology in an online context.

Publicizing Adler ETC. This is essentially a marketing task for which a number of options exist. Several means have been tried in a pilot mode as a way of obtaining formative evaluation.

- The creation of Adler ETC. was announced to several relatives and friends who are in the health care and education industries, and asked them to read the posts and comment as they saw fit. This resulted in several comments.
- A message was posted on an Adlerian-focused Yahoo! news group inviting the group’s members to visit Adler ETC. and participate. At the time of this writing, this did not result in comments but did result in the identification of some useful content for which this author received permission to repost on Adler ETC.
- Adler ETC. was advertised on this author’s personal Facebook page but as of this writing no activity has been experienced as a result.
- This author created a Twitter account and started following several users but as of this writing has not received any tweets.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While the initial acceptance of Adler ETC. that is noted above may not seem very promising at first look, in fact this author is encouraged, and has concluded that Adler ETC. is a potentially useful tool for promoting knowledge and practice of individual psychology in online contexts. As previously noted, there are over 162 million blogs as of this writing and it would be unrealistic to expect a flood of traffic without considerable marketing effort. There are several steps that would help in that regard.
**Expanded Web presence.** Making Adler ETC. known to more directories, news groups, social media channels, and so forth would raise the visibility of the learning community. Continuing to seek contact via those channels that have already been established will be helpful. Persistence is an important success factor in establishing a following for any Web site.

**Video Web presence.** In addition to the current text based marketing channels mentioned above, it would be helpful to record several small videos introducing Adler ETC. in some way, and post them to YouTube and similar sites. These videos could be based initially on content already posted on Adler ETC.

**Collegial contact.** People with whom this author comes into professional contact can be informed of the existence of Adler ETC. and invite their participation.

**Professional groups.** This author can identify professional organizations whose members might have an interest and make Adler ETC. known to the organizations.

**Publication.** This author can identify professional publications whose readers might be interested and submit an article introducing Adler ETC.

In conjunction with these marketing steps, it is important to increase the likelihood that people who take a first look at Adler ETC. also continue as members. Applying the findings of Seok In, Jeakyoung and Sooyeon (2009) that were discussed earlier in this paper will be helpful in that regard. This author anticipates that the most immediate benefit would be realized by (a) developing more content, especially applications of individual psychology; and (b) adding additional features and resources, such as video files.
References


Appendix A

The following are the initial posts made in the category of Foundations. They have been reformatted somewhat from their on-screen layout in order to meet the requirements of APA standards.

What is Individual Psychology?

Individual psychology is a complex system of ideas, but its fundamental tenet is that all the psychological processes of a person are organized into a unified, consistent whole, which in turn is operative in striving toward a unique self-ideal (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The former term in the above describes the person’s life-style, while the latter term refers to the fictional goal – so named because it is idealized rather than realistic.

Individual psychology thus stands in clear contrast to models that describe behavior in terms of competing levels of consciousness and incompatible drives within the individual, for example, the psychology of Freud: “For Freud, all human conflicts are intra-personal, caused by opposing conflicts within the personality structure…[f]or Adler, all problems and conflicts are inter-personal…Adler emphasizes the significance of the attitude toward others.” (Dreikurs, 1989, p. 3)

In fact, Adler wrote at length about the importance of one’s attitude toward others, terming it social interest. For Adler, when a person whose life-style lacks in social interest encounters external problems that require social interest for their solution, the result is one of the difficulties commonly termed neuroses, psychoses, etc. (Adler, 1982). Significantly, when this happens, both the life-style and the goal remain unchanged. As Adler stated, “…the failure shows the same style as the individual. As I mentioned before, the life-style persists.” (Adler, 1982, p. 5) Similarly, Dreikurs (1989) stated that two seemingly inconsistent behaviors merely
represent alternative ways of reaching the same goal, as for example, a child may choose either obedience or defiance as a means of gaining attention.

Make a connection.

The use of the word individual in individual psychology is a confusing translation. As Dreikurs (1989) stated, the word rendered in English as individual actually has the literal meaning of indivisible, or undivided. Thus a term more faithful to Adler’s meaning would have been something like indivisible psychology.

References

(References for citations in post content have been consolidated into the reference list in the body of the paper.)

Private logic

Private logic, a term…adapted from Adler's "private intelligence," describes the fictional line of reasoning proceeding from private meaning, that is, meaning premised upon the person's private and unique valuation of self, others, and the world, and what life requires of him or her. (Griffith and Powers, as cited in Manaster, 2009, p. 5-6)

Private logic diverges from common sense…the degree of divergence, the discrepancy between private logic and common sense, what Adler called the iron logic of social living, is an indicator or measure of mental health. (Manaster, 2009, p. 5)

The socially embedded nature of individual psychology is evident in the above statements. When we act, we do so in accordance with our private logic, which is largely unknown to us but nonetheless determines our behavior.

For example, a student may believe that he should get A’s in all of his classes, and that if he doesn’t he is a failure. This is his private logic. To avoid being a failure he takes only classes
that offer the prospect of easy A’s, and he is anxious about his school experience to the point where his performance is significantly diminished. A common sense perspective, however, might reasonably be that one’s performance will vary among classes for a variety of factors, and that even if one does not score 100%, a good effort will produce valuable results.

Dreikurs (1989) described the manner in which our private logic evolves as a result of our understanding of our earliest experiences. He also stated that once developed, private logic is persistent and can only change when the individual achieves true self knowledge.

*Make a connection.*

Oberst and Stewart (2003) described biased apperception, whereby individuals pay attention to information that tends to support their beliefs while ignoring information that does not. What implications does biased apperception have for the development of self knowledge? How might biased apperceptions be overcome?

**References**

(References for citations in post content have been consolidated into the reference list in the body of the paper.)

**Courage**

The courageous person can look at a situation, a task, or an event in terms of possible actions and solutions rather than potential threats and dangers. Therefore, he can move without hesitation, persist without slackening, and proceed without withdrawing.

(Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 2000, p. 32)

For Adler, courage meant the degree to which individuals are focused on the tasks which confront them, and are active in solving their problems (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). To possess this orientation is to have “…the ability and willingness to accept anything that may
come without feeling defeated and without giving up in despair…maintaining one's value and self-respect seem to be the outstanding features of a courageous person” (Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 2000, p. 33-34).

Adler believed that an encouraging manner must be a constant in a helping relationship (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956), recognizing that failures of courage are in fact also failures of social interest and thus at the heart of neuroses. While Adler spoke primarily of therapeutic relationships, Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (2000) dealt at length with the similar importance of encouragement in education.

*Make a connection.*

Consider the characteristics of encouragement and of praise as you see them. Is there a difference? Consult a text on child psychology for additional background if you are interested.

**References**

(References for citations in post content have been consolidated into the reference list in the body of the paper.)

**Life tasks**

There is a task in life which no individual can escape. It is to solve a great number of problems…I have divided them for clarity into three parts: problems of behavior toward others; problems of occupation; and problems of love. The manner in which an individual behaves toward these three problems and their subdivisions – that is his answer to the problems of life. (Adler, 1982, p. 4)

The three problems that Adler noted have been widely discussed in the literature, and are frequently known as the “Adlerian life tasks” or a similar term. For our purposes, they are summarized from Oberst and Stewart (2003): work, one’s vocation or occupation; love,
emotionally intimate relationships; community, caring about and for the welfare of others.

Several important points must be made regarding the life tasks.

Of paramount importance is the creative and individual nature of how the tasks are carried out; it represents the individual’s own “answer to the problems of life” rather than a nomothetic standard. However partitioned and defined, the life tasks are carried out under the direction of the individual’s life style (Adler, 1982) and thus are consistent with the unity of the individual’s personality.

Also, by noting that his division of the whole into three parts was “for clarity” and by reference to further “subdivisions”, Adler may have been acknowledging the possibility of other, equally valid conceptualizations of the life tasks. In any event, others have proposed additions and modifications.

For example, Mosak and Dreikurs examined Adler’s cumulative writings on the subject and proposed that the addition of two more tasks was justified: self, the task of relating to one’s self; spirituality, the task of determining meaning for one’s own life (Dreikurs & Mosak, 1967; Mosak & Dreikurs, 2000). Mansager and Gold (2000) challenged these two new tasks, claiming that Adler’s writings did not in fact support Dreikurs and Mosak (Mansager & Gold, 2000; Gold & Mansager, 2000). Their challenge seems to have been largely ignored, as a list of five tasks appears frequently in the literature (e.g., Eckstein and Kern, 2003) and is referred to as the Adlerian/Mosak life tasks.

An alternative framework of life tasks, based not on Adler but rather on the bagua, an element of Chinese philosophy important in feng shui, was proposed by Snyder (2010).

Make a connection.
Spirituality, the task of determining meaning for one’s own life, is probably the most broadly defined of the life tasks. Assuming that you view the task as appropriate for inclusion in the list of life tasks, how would you define it in the context of your life?

References

(References for citations in post content have been consolidated into the reference list in the body of the paper.)

Function of memory

The functions of memory are dominated by the necessity of adaptation.

Without memories it would be impossible to exercise any precaution for the future. We may deduce that all recollections have an unconscious purpose within themselves. They are not fortuitous phenomena, but speak clearly the language of encouragement and warning. There are no indifferent or nonsensical recollections. We remember those events whose recollection is important for a specific psychic tendency [attitude], because these recollections further an important underlying movement. We forget likewise all those events which detract from the fulfillment of a plan. Every memory is dominated by the goal idea which directs the personality-as-a-whole. (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher, 1947, p. 197-198)

Perhaps one of the most intriguing propositions of individual psychology is the role it assigns to memory. Adler’s leap of intuition was in conceptualizing memory as a tool used actively in the service of the individual’s goal, rather than as a passive recorder of data (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). A simple and familiar example is that of a child who, not yet being comfortable with school, misplaces his or her books (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).
Note that it is not as simple a matter as only a portion of our experiences being committed to memory. Rather, as Dreikurs (1989) stated, all experiences are recorded, even if we are not always aware of them. We can choose to recall them or not to recall them to serve our real intentions, which are not known to us.

Further, Adler did not believe that recollections are necessarily faithful records of actual facts (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Instead, what is recalled or omitted from the recollection is in line with the individual’s private logic, which says “it must have happened that way, because that’s the way I/they/the world is.” As a result, what details are chosen for inclusion or omission serve as windows into the life-style of the individual.

Make a connection.

1. If remembering is a projective activity, are there implications for such situations as eyewitness courtroom testimony?

2. Adlerian therapists often prompt early recollections in order to gain insight into the client’s private logic. In what ways would this be similar to and different from the issue of false memory syndrome (Gardner, 2004)?

References

(References for citations in post content have been consolidated into the reference list in the body of the paper.)

Social interest

The leading idea of the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler is found in his recognition of the importance of human society, not only for the development of the individual character, but also for the orientation of every single action and emotion in the life of a human being. (Dreikurs, 1989, p. 1)
This orientation, that is, the individual’s urge to respond to the demands of adapting to and fitting in with the social group is what Adler termed social interest.

Ansbacher (1978, 1991) traced the development of Adler’s idea of social interest over four decades of Adler’s writings. During this time Adler gradually changed his conceptualization of social interest as a more or less physiological drive, in the nature of Freud’s psychology, to a cognitive function that is innate but only partially developed at birth (Ansbacher, 1991).

Oberst and Stewart (2003) made the point that social interest is not only the cause for engaging with others, but is also the result. The authors also stated that it is not the mere performance of good deeds which is social interest; rather, it is the feeling of belonging: As the expression ‘community feeling’ suggests, it has to be something felt, not only done. The act is a consequence of the feeling. Doing a good deed without the ‘right’ attitude has the opposite finality: not to contribute to the community, but to care exclusively for one’s own self.

(p. 18)

Make a connection.

1. What do you think social interest means in an online community?

2. Do you think it is necessary to reexamine the concept of social interest as a result of the emergence of the online world? How?

References

(References for citations in post content have been consolidated into the reference list in the body of the paper.)

Ten central assertions of individual psychology
Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956) described a dozen basic propositions of individual psychology that are still widely quoted and accepted (Silverman & Corsini, 1984). They are condensed and summarized as follows.

1. The basic human dynamic is a striving from a felt minus position to a felt plus position.

2. This striving is directed by a self-created goal, or self-ideal. The goal is idealized and therefore is fictional.

3. The goal is dimly understood and thus mostly unknown; the unknown part represents the “unconscious”.

4. The goal is the final cause of behavior, and is central to understanding the individual.

5. All the psychological processes of an individual form a consistent, goal-oriented unity, which is the individual’s life-style.

6. All apparent psychological constructs and factors, such as drives, intrapsychic conflicts, biology, and history, establish propensities only. They are applied by the individual in accordance with the life-style.

7. The life-style includes the individual’s opinions of himself, others, and the world, which influence every psychological process.

8. Individuals can only be understood in their social contexts. Problems and values are socially based.

9. Social interest, which is the individual’s positive attitude toward others, is an innate human ability but must be developed in order for effective social adjustment.

10. Maladjustment results from a lack of social interest, feelings of inferiority, and socially useless goals. The result is one of the difficulties commonly termed neuroses, psychoses, etc.

Make a connection.
Do these assertions seem to accurately describe the human condition? Do you take issue or find any of them to be inadequate?

References

(References for citations in post content have been consolidated into the reference list in the body of the paper.)
Appendix B

The following are the initial posts made in the category of History. They have been reformatted somewhat from their on-screen layout in order to meet the requirements of APA standards.

Alfred Adler

Alfred Adler was born in a suburb of Vienna, Austria in 1870. He became a medical doctor, psychotherapist and, most significantly, the originator of the body of ideas known as individual psychology.

Adler was early afflicted with rickets. He later recalled:

I was reared and watched with the greatest solicitude on account of my sickliness…I must have been forced to put up with a great deal less of this attention when my younger brother was born…I took this apparent loss of attention on the part of my mother very much to heart.

(Bottome, 1939, p. 21)

Many of Adler’s family members were gifted musicians. Adler himself possessed the attributes of a talented singer and dramatic performer, although he seems not to have actualized them, even in later years as a lecturer (Bottome, 1939). He instead chose the sciences. Adler began his medical practice in ophthalmology, shifting later to neurology and psychiatry (Hirsch, 2005). This path no doubt helped lead him to a collegial relationship with Viennese psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, beginning in 1902 when Adler joined Freud’s psychoanalysis discussion group. This group, which came to be known as the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, also included such prominent thinkers as Carl Jung and Otto Rank (Hopkins, 1939).

Freud nominated Adler as the group’s president in 1910. However, Adler and Freud soon parted company for ideological reasons. Adler then founded the Society for Individual
Psychology (Hirsch, 2005); for a thorough exposition of the principles of individual psychology, see Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956).

Adler had great practical as well as theoretical interest in mental health. He lectured and conducted seminars at great length on prevention of mental disorders. Ansbacher (1992) details Adler’s ideas about prevention and describes the educational counseling centers that Adler established in the Vienna schools. There were more than 30 such centers in 1934. At that time the changing political conditions in pre-World War II Europe led to the clinics closing, and also to Adler’s emigration to the United States (Ansbacher, 1956). He continued to teach and lecture until his sudden death from a heart attack in 1937 (Bottome, 1939).

Make a connection.

1. Adler put great emphasis on the value of approaching the task of life with courage, once stating that:

What do you first do when you are learning to swim…? You make mistakes, do you not? Well-life is just the same as learning to swim! Do not be afraid of making mistakes, for there is no other way of learning how to live! (Bottome, 1939, p. 27).

How does this way of living speak to you?

2. Another central concept in Adler’s theory is the idea of striving for superiority (Ackerknecht, 1988; Ansbacher, 1978; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Hjertaas, 2004). What do you see in the above vignettes from Adler’s early life that may have contributed to the development of this idea?

References

(References for citations in post content have been consolidated into the reference list in the body of the paper.)
Rudolf Dreikurs

Biographical details not otherwise credited below are from Terner and Pew (1978).

Rudolf Dreikurs was born in Vienna, Austria in 1897. He became a medical doctor, psychiatrist and educator. His most noteworthy contributions to individual psychology were in transforming its original theoretical foundations into systems of clinical practice as well as significantly expanding its scope (Bitter, 1997; Bitter, 2007).

Dreikurs’ childhood relationships with significant adults were marked by emotional conflict. As Terner and Pew (1978) state:

His stern father impatiently demanded perfection of him, his mother indulged and pampered him, and nursemaids, aunts and uncles all made Rudi the focus of attention…[he] quickly grasped that to be important and to have a place in the family, he must be the center of attention. The rub was that he also had to live up to all the demands placed on him…Suddenly, when he was five, Rudolf’s world was torn asunder, his throne toppled, and his sovereignty destroyed by the arrival of a baby sister, Bertha. (p. 5)

At the age of about fifteen, Dreikurs aligned with a youth movement that engaged in discussion groups largely focused on school reform. He soon organized a Sprechsal ("speaking hall") to host one of these discussion groups. Dreikurs there learned the value of public sharing of ideas in an open setting. He later experienced that value again through his association with Alfred Adler.

Dreikurs first met Adler in 1921 as a result of their mutual involvement in the postwar labor movement’s efforts to foster improvements in education and cultural enrichment. Adler’s participation led to his establishment of child guidance clinics in Vienna and elsewhere. The number of clinics grew rapidly, and Dreikurs was part of a group trained to work in the new
clinics. Dreikurs’ appreciation of Adler’s ideas grew steadily, and by the time Dreikurs opened his private practice in 1927 he fully embraced individual psychology, an attitude that he maintained for the remainder of his life.

With the ascent to power of Hitler, political and social conditions in Europe became increasingly threatening, especially to Jewish intellectuals such as Dreikurs. Accordingly, about 1934 he formed the intention to leave Vienna, although it took three years for him to do so. Finally in 1937 (the year in which Adler died) Dreikurs left Europe entirely. He stopped for a time in Brazil and then made his way to Chicago where he began to put Adlerian ideas into practice.

Dreikurs’ first major effort in the United States was the establishment in 1939 of a child guidance clinic at the Abraham Lincoln Center in a lower-class Chicago neighborhood. He continued to develop his ideas about individual psychology and to put them into action through teaching, lecturing, and clinical practice until his death in 1972. By that time Dreikurs had published over 300 works (Bitter, 1997). Many of them remain relevant today and are widely studied and cited, for example his classic *Children: The Challenge* (Dreikurs, 1964). In 1951, Dreikurs founded the Alfred Adler Institute, later the Adler School of Professional Psychology, in Chicago. The school grew steadily and in 1955 offered its first postgraduate program in psychotherapy (Terner & Pew, 1978).

**Make a connection.**

Dreikurs’ early experiences as an active member and organizer of youth discussion groups seem to have had a lasting influence on him. Are there experiences that have had equally significant impacts for you?

References
(References for citations in post content have been consolidated into the reference list in the body of the paper.)
Appendix C

The following is the initial post made in the category of Applications. It have been reformatted somewhat from their on-screen layout in order to meet the requirements of APA standards.

**Adlerian brief therapy training program: Distance learning example**

Distance training in Classical Adlerian Brief Therapy is now being offered by the Alfred Adler Institute of Northwestern Washington. Based on the original teachings and therapeutic style of Alfred Adler, and the innovative techniques of Anthony Bruck, who studied with Adler, this 18-month, mentor-oriented program leads to Certification, with options for including training in Career Assessment and Organizational Consulting. A unique blend of Socratic questioning and creative graphics provides efficient, time-saving strategies for the rapid resolution of many client difficulties.

Our mentors guide students through self-paced home study of selected books, published and unpublished articles, audio and video recordings, and weekly one-to-one telephone or Skype discussions. A personal study-analysis, case supervision, and a 3-day, experiential workshop ensure the effective fusion of theory and practice.

For additional information about distance training and Certification in Classical Adlerian Brief Therapy or Depth Psychotherapy, go to www.Adlerian.us.

For further discussion, call me, Dr. Henry Stein, Director of the Alfred Adler
Institute of Northwestern Washington, at (360) 647-5670. (Reposted from Yahoo™ news group by permission of author)

*Make a connection.*

This program is of interest to me primarily because of the way in which a variety of media and interaction modes have been combined to create presence in a distance training locus.
Appendix D

The following are the initial supporting pages. They have been reformatted somewhat from their on-screen layout in order to meet the requirements of APA standards.

Start Here!

Hello!

This blog is for people who are interested in the individual psychology of Alfred Adler and in questions about its relevancy in a world where interpersonal relationships are increasingly experienced as a part of cyberculture. I refer to Bell (2007) for the definition of cyberculture:

Cyberculture … refers here to ways of life in cyberspace, or ways of life shaped by cyberspace, where cyberspace is a matrix of embedded practices and representations…[T]hinking about cyberculture involves thinking about representations, meanings, images; about the ways in which we assemble particular narratives about how these new technologies have changed, are changing, or will change our lives. (p. 5-6)

As Marshall McLuhan stated, “…the personal and social consequences of any medium - that is, of any extension of ourselves - result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology” (McLuhan, 1994, p. 7). This is not a technology blog; we are only concerned with the consequences to which McLuhan refers. A great many questions can be raised as a result of considering them. Here are a few samples, with no implications of priority or importance.

- How do we experience friends in an online world?
- How is emotional intimacy developed in online media?
- How are work relationships different for online workers?
- How does media based interaction and feedback affect the development of self?
• How does the Internet affect our sense of psychological nearness and alienation?
• Are there communities in cyberspace?
• Are media technologies changing faster than individuals and social groups can adapt?

I’ve provided a basic introduction to a few Adlerian concepts. Readers who are not familiar with individual psychology will find these posts helpful. Links to these posts can be found by selecting the “Table of Contents” link.

I look forward to hearing from and learning about you. Come in, look around, and comment wherever you wish. In addition to commenting on the posts, you can use the Contact Me form to suggest ideas for blog content, questions, or remarks. Consider sharing your insights by writing for the blog as well. That would be a wonderful example of social interest! Of course, you will receive authorship credit for anything that you write.

Regards,
Leonard

References
(References for citations in post content have been consolidated into the reference list in the body of the paper.)

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Contact form

You can use this form to contact me if you would like to make comments or ask questions, or for any other reason. I would love to learn about your experiences with individual psychology, the online world, or any other topic of interest to you.

If you have suggestions for blog content, format, etc., please let me know. If you would like to write for the blog, that would be great! You will of course receive credit for anything that you write.

Your e-mail address won't be given to anyone else.