Perspectives On What It Means To Be An Adlerian In The 21st Century

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Abstract
This paper investigates what it means to be an Adlerian and whether Adler’s ideas have relevance in the 21st century. The research includes a literature review and a qualitative study in which twenty individuals were interviewed in-person during the 2010 North American Society of Adlerian Psychologists’ annual meeting and another seven individuals provided written responses to a questionnaire afterwards. The interview consisted of basic demographic information and the question “What does it mean to be an Adlerian?” The data was analyzed to identify patterns in the responses based on sex, age, and length of exposure to Adlerian study that are described. An Adlerian Archetype is developed based on characteristics the author identifies from the literature and the interviews. The author concludes there is need for more research into the validity of the Adlerian Archetype and the usefulness of exposure to Adlerian Psychology for developing the identified characteristics. Should this research prove that greater exposure to Adlerian study promotes the development of the identified characteristics, the author proposes this shows a strong basis for increasing the profile of Adlerian theory.
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"… we now leave rightly the ground of absolute certitude, on which so many psychologists bustle about" (Adler as cited in Moore, 1954, p. 6).

What Does It Mean To Be An Adlerian?

Is “being an Adlerian” as simple as asserting one applies the ideas and principles of Alfred Adler in his or her work? Does being an Adlerian require having studied at an institution that teaches Individual Psychology in the curriculum? How many books or articles must one read before one becomes “an Adlerian?” Is a two-week stint at ICASSI enough? Must one have studied with one of Adler’s disciples? If one does not hold to the original three tasks of life is one still “a true Adlerian?” Is there a litmus test for just how Adlerian one is or is not?

This paper explores what it means to be an Adlerian through a literature review and a qualitative study that is described. Ultimately an Adlerian Archetype is developed. First, we address why this question is being raised, then a brief discussion of whether Adler’s theories hold relevance in 2011 follows.

Why Is This Question Important?

Perusing The Journal of Individual Psychology one recognizes the issue of what it means to be an Adlerian has sparked controversy over the years. Rudolf Dreikurs (1972) and James Bitter (2007) have published articles entitled “Am I an Adlerian? Harold Mosak (2003) made comparable statements in a memorable lecture. Len Sperry (2007) devised an entire organizational scheme by which to categorize the degree of “Adlerianism” in one’s theoretical orientation. From where did these identity crises arise?
In the summer of 1997, Arthur Freeman in speaking to the North American Society of Adlerian Psychologists (NĀSAP) raised the following concerns:

[Adler’s] revolutionary ideas of seven decades ago have become dogma in the latter part of the century. A cult of personality has grown up with the intent of looking back at where we were ‘in the good old days’ and has failed to carry Adler’s ideas and ideals forward into the 21st century. (1999, p. 130)

Freeman noted there seemed to be few Adlerians and the numbers were dwindling even lower. He feared that retiring members were not being replaced by a younger generation. He argued that Individual Psychology had been one of the most “covertly influential forces in psychology and psychotherapy” (1999, p. 137) perhaps because Adlerians found it too undemocratic or self-aggrandizing to take credit for the importance of their work. He cited Kopp’s comment that Adlerians are “one of the few groups that aspire to be a footnote” (1999, p. 138).

This certainly seems consistent with Adler’s own lifestyle. It has been said about him that Adler’s goal was to make the world a better place, not to leave a legacy or become a legend (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006). Yet those, like myself, who find his work compelling and believe that Adler’s ideas are important, do not want those ideas to die out because they are only preached amongst the choir. Thus, my hope is that by answering the question “what it means to be an Adlerian” and defining an Adlerian Archetype it will be easier to discuss the 21st century relevance of Adler in mainstream psychological literature.
And The Question Is?

In the process of conducting the interviews that will be described one interviewee was adamant that I was asking the wrong question. This interviewee’s concern was that in the past such questions had concentrated primarily on theoretical orientation, focused outward, and cast judgments about people’s place or position within various organizations. The judgments that were formed carried a connotation of “goodness” or “badness,” a sense of being “in” or “out.” This individual wanted to stay away from this area of inquiry, preferring to keep the focus not on people, but rather on theory. In this interviewee’s opinion people use a particular type of theory in their practice, but that is the extent of it, practitioners are not defined by the theory they use.

Giving full credence to this interviewee’s concern with any question that may serve to divide the Adlerian community, my purpose in exploring what it means to be an Adlerian is not to create an inclusionary/exclusionary test for Adlerianism. It is not meant to label practitioners as true Adlerians, near Adlerians, neo-Adlerians, or non-Adlerians. Nor is it not meant to develop criteria for membership in an organization. Rather, it is proposed that the term Adlerian might encompass a broader concept than how one approaches therapy, counseling, or education. What does it mean to be Adlerian in how one approaches all aspects of one’s life? How does one move in the world? Is there an Adlerian lifestyle?

Freeman quoted Rollo May as saying “Adler’s viewpoint has the merit of emphasizing a profoundly important point—namely the needs of the human to be a responsible social creature are as fundamental as his needs to express his individualistic, egoistic urgings” (1999, p. 138). Asking: “What does it mean to be an Adlerian?” is the equivalent in my view of asking: What does it take as a healthy human being to get along in society and touch others so they might do
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This is a personal question about lifestyle, not a professional question about theoretical orientation. Certainly the two overlap and this paper will discuss that overlap. But the more interesting question in my mind is to what extent does exposure to Adlerian theory influence how people look at the world and their place in it.

Is Adler Still Relevant in 2011?

Adler broke with Freud exactly one hundred years ago founding his own branch of psychotherapy not long thereafter. His untimely death in 1937, at the age of 67, means many of his most important ideas are almost a century old. Considering the dramatic social, cultural, migratory, and technological changes that have occurred in that time period—many in just the past two or three decades—raises the question of whether Individual Psychology is still relevant in 2011.

Adler believed in personal choice, social responsibility, and the rights of women and children (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006). He was a humanist, who supported the need to improve the living conditions of the poor. He believed in education and skills training, so that people could solve their own problems and live a better life. “He had a passionate concern for the common person and was against all forms of prejudice” (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006, p. 17). As Carlson, Watts and Maniaci note:

The Adlerian approach is one that shows great respect for all people regardless of gender, ethnicity, behavior, and so on. It is a truly democratic approach that respects the notion that all people are equal and deserve to be treated in that fashion. Adlerians advocate for social justice and the rights of all people. (2006, p. 18)
One need look no further than the front page of a newspaper or watch more than a few minutes of most newscasts to realize that genocide, racism, poverty, social unrest, and new and more destructive weapons challenge the world today, just as they did in Adler’s day. Times at the local, national, and global levels are as precarious now as they were then. So, what do Adler’s theories and Adlerians bring to the world that can help in such difficult times?

Dreikurs-Ferguson (2004) recognizes that Adlerians understand and model good democratic processes, including the responsibilities that come with living in a democracy. This includes teaching children “mutual respect, methods of peaceful negotiation, and skills for working in mutually supportive and cooperative ways with others” (p. 6). She suggests that as our leaders are looking for ways to find peaceful and constructive solutions to societal struggles they would be well served to incorporate Adlerian concepts.

Adler believed all humans have an innate desire to belong (Dreikurs Ferguson, 1984), which brings with it a goal to contribute to and a concern for the welfare of those with whom one lives in community. Gemeinschaftsgefühl (literally a feeling for or with the community) is most commonly translated as “social interest” in the United States and has become almost a stand-in for living up to one’s greatest human potential as an Adlerian. Of course, how to foster social interest in enough individuals in a society such as ours which values competitiveness, individualism, and vertical striving remains a challenge. There is a need for Adlerian education to readjust a focus on intrinsic responsibility, rather than extrinsic motivation (Dreikurs Ferguson, 2004).
Scientists working in the areas of neuroscience and attachment have made discoveries that may have interesting implications in this area. Rifkin (2010a) notes that mirror neurons, sometimes referred to as “empathy neurons,” allow species which posses them to feel and experience each other’s situations as if they were their own. Sounding much like Adler one hundred years ago Rifkin points out that humans are innately social creatures: “We are, it appears, the most social of animals and seek intimate participation and companionship with our fellows” (2010a).

Rifkin finds hope in mirror neurons and the empathic connections that people develop as a result of them. In fact, he has argued that developing a sense of one-to-another connectedness and empathy with the whole human race and the biosphere may be the only hope for our planet (2010b). According to Rifkin (2010a) this would require rejecting the individualistic, nationalistic and self-interested past and harnessing our empathic sensibilities to transform our world into a new era that is ruled by a global ethic of biosphere consciousness.

I begin with the assumption that the research on mirror neurons is correct and that it is possible as human beings for us to impact each other’s emotional states by how we interact. Given this assumption I believe that the more individuals who strive to reach the Adlerian Archetype in their personal life and the more people who spread Adlerian teachings to others, the greater the chance that social interest will spread throughout the world. As each Adlerian touches another person in “one-to-another connectedness” more Adlerian Archetypes will develop and more social interest will spread. As the conclusion of this paper will argue this is the hope for future generations. And this is the challenge for future generations of Adlerians.
Literature Review

Individual Psychology is a value psychology in which mentally healthy individuals take into consideration the interests of more than just themselves (Ansbacher, 1968). It is also a future-oriented psychology in that individuals striving for future goals determine their reactions towards and behaviors in the present.

Ansbacher goes on to say that if society is composed of goal-striving individuals, then society itself is innately goal striving. (Ansbacher, 1992). Arguably if those individuals are filled with social interest and therefore mentally healthy (i.e. striving on the useful side of life) then society should be healthy as well. Conversely if society is filled with the self-absorbed, then society will not thrive.

So what can the literature on Individual Psychology tell us about the Adlerian Archetype? Does it exist? If so, how do we define it? Is it a good thing? If so, how do we create more Adlerian Archetypes?
The Tenets of Adlerian Psychology

Adlerians see human behavior as socially embedded, goal-directed, and built on private logic (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006). At its heart Adlerian psychology is a psychology of use, not of possession. That is to say, Adlerians focus on what individuals make of their situations and experiences rather than how to label their pathologies and dysfunctions. Adlerian therapists orient their work around the present and future, rather than dwelling in the past. Adlerian therapists may be more directed and action oriented than other therapists. What other basic tenets of Adlerian psychology are important?

Everything can be different. According to Yalom: “There is no truth, there is only interpretation” (2002, p. 176). Of course, as an existentialist, Yalom credits Nietzsche with informing his view regarding a client’s internal reality, but those who have studied the life work of Alfred Adler know that he built an entire psychological theory based on this concept. The subjective interpretation that humans put on events, their “apperception,” creates their behavioral response, not the objective scenario before them or some pre-determined response (Dreikurs Ferguson, 1984). Why is this important? Because interpretations are formed as a result of cognitive processes and can be changed given appropriate insight and reorientation. Adler believed that “everyone is master of the way in which he utilizes his experiences” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 212).

According to Ansbacher who translated it from the German as Hertha Orgler related it to him, Adler himself said:

Man is not evil by nature. Whatever wrongs a man may have committed, seduced by an erroneous opinion of life it need not oppress him; he can change. The past
is dead, he is free to be happy and to give pleasure to others.” (Ansbacher, 1974, p. 1)

Adlerians hold as a core philosophy the notion that individuals are constantly in the process of creating who they are and who they want to be in the world (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006). While Adlerians acknowledge the influence of the past, they do not believe people are bound to their history. The path they take is of their own choosing and their present behaviors and future goals will to a large extent color their memories of the past.

Perhaps Stein has said it best:

At the heart of Individual Psychology is Adler’s belief that everything can be different: We all can change. Not merely change a symptom, modify our behavior, or acknowledge our mistakes, but change our core personality. (2008, p. 4)

**Gemeinschaftsgefühl.** Adlerian scholars have translated Gemeinschaftsgefühl in a variety of ways. There has been and continues in some circles to this day to be debate about what the most authentic meaning is for this core Adlerian concept. While it literally translates from the German as “community feeling,” the term “social interest” is the most commonly accepted term in North America (Ansbacher, 1992) and according to Heinz and Rowena Ansbacher (1956) the term that Adler himself came to prefer. Whatever the appropriate translation, the notion certainly has to do with making the world a better place, one of Adler’s great passions (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006). Social interest is something that Adlerians have taken to heart.
Ansbacher (1968) has called social interest the cardinal personality trait in Adlerian psychology “having a pervasive influence on a wide variety of other personal traits and attitudes” (Crandall J., 1975, p. 187). According to Adler (1937) the degree of social interest a person displays is the “main characteristic of each person and is involved in all his actions” (p. 774).

Ansbacher (1968) describes social interest as Adler’s criterion for mental health. It involves an “aptitude for cooperation and social living which can be developed through training” (p. 132). Those with social interest have developed the “objective abilities of cooperating and contributing, as well as understanding others and empathizing with them” (p. 132). Social interest is what keeps the innate striving for superiority on the socially useful side rather than on the socially useless side of those who are mentally healthy.

The empathic global citizen. While social interest is certainly not so limited, it is often viewed in terms of the community in which one lives, works, and loves. Not only did Adler not create such an explicit local limitation on the concept, arguably he meant for social interest to have a much broader reach, one that might embrace an “affirmative attitude toward life in general and all objects in the world” (Ansbacher, 1968, p. 134).

In a voice that sounds remarkably like Rifkin’s (2010a; 2010b) Adler discussed “social feeling” (a term also used by Adler for Gemeinschaftsgefühl):

The social feeling remains throughout life, changed, colored, circumscribed in some cases, enlarged and broadened in others until it touches not only the members of [the individual’s] own family, but also his [sic] clan, his [sic] nation, and finally, the whole humanity. It is possible that it may extend beyond these
boundaries and express itself toward animals, plants, lifeless objects, or finally towards the whole cosmos. (1954, p. 60)

Ansbacher cites others who have also recognized that Adler’s use of “Gemeinschaft”—the German word for community or society—is not limited to a community of humans, but means a general connectedness. He refers to the opposite of self-centered as being self-transcendent, wherein one might identify with or relate to the whole universe or the whole of life. Ansbacher reminded us that not all Adlerian scholars agree with this broad cosmological view of the term Gemeinschaftsgefühl. Some would limit the concept “feelings of belonging” and at least one scholar would find a middle ground in the term “humanistic identification.” Ansbacher himself opted for a construction focused on humankind’s interests:

[T]o preserve the significance of social interest as a criterion of mental health, it has been necessary to focus on its property of usefulness, defined by Adler as ‘in the interests of mankind.’ Social interest would then seem to be most properly defined as ‘an interest in the interests of mankind.’ (1968, p. 148)

Certainly there has been debate about exactly how to define social interest. Peterson noted “greater agreement among Adlerians (including Adler himself) that social interest is important than there is agreement on exactly what constitutes social interest” (Peterson, 1985, as cited in Bass M. L., Curlette, Kern, & McWilliams, 2002, pp. 4-5).

Social interest vs. community feeling. In later years Ansbacher found an appreciation for the term “community feeling” that he had not recognized earlier and he began to distinguish between that term and the term social interest (Ansbacher, 1992). Rather than synonyms he saw them as having subtle but important differences in meaning.
Ansbacher saw in Adler’s writings about Gemeinschaftsgefühl the concept of the cosmos and “being in harmony with the universe” (Ansbacher, 1992, p. 403). According to Ansbacher, Adler was aware that this touched on the metaphysical world:

Adler was well aware that he was thereby entering the realm of metaphysics.

Some of his followers deplored this. But he saw no reason to be afraid of metaphysics; it has had a very great influence on human life and development.

“We are not blessed with absolute truth and therefore are forced to have thoughts about our future, about the results of our actions, etc.”” (p. 403)

Ansbacher noted that Adler also wrote in German using the term “soziales Interesse” and that he used both this term and the term Gemeinschaftsgefühl at different times. Ansbacher considered this proof that Adler saw them as separate concepts and that he did not mean for the term social interest to replace the term community feeling as the translation for Gemeinschaftsgefühl. Ansbacher believed the difference in the terms relates to the state of activity involved: feeling is a passive or inactive state of mind, whereas interest requires an active, guiding behavior (Ansbacher, 1992). With regard to community feeling one feels a part of something larger than oneself and develops compassion and empathy towards others who are also a part of that entity. With regard to social interest one is motivated to act on behalf of others. Thus, Ansbacher notes, Adler “fortunately … provided once, quite incidentally, an excellent clarification, when at the end of a long sentence he qualified social interest as ‘the action-line of community feeling’” (1992, p. 405).

Carlson, Watts and Maniacci (2006) also describe this distinction between community feeling and social interest: community feeling is the “empathetic bond” and social interest is “the
action that derives from that feeling” (pp. 84-85). They contend that these concepts are not time-limited and are global, in other words they apply across cultures and historical contexts. However, these authors seem to limit both constructs exclusively as something humans feel for other humans.

**Social interest: a distinct personality trait.** Understanding how important social interest is to the Adlerian theory of personality Stasio and Capron (1998) looked at whether it could be defined as a distinct personality construct. They reviewed other theories of personality and determined that social interest, as a psychological construct, was indeed different.

First, research conducted in the 1980s suggested that there are five factors that comprise the human personality, with individuals falling along a spectrum of the dimensions of neuroticism, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (Stasio & Capron, 1998). These are sometimes referred to as The Big Five personality factors. Stasio and Capron analyzed a model developed to measure The Big Five compared to social interest and found they “clearly indicate incompatible conceptions of personality” (p. 13). In other words, in their view social interest is something different than any of the Big Five personality factors.

Second, the authors explored empathy, which is “assumed to be an important trait related to the development of social interest” (Stasio & Capron, 1998, p. 15). Here they looked at a number of measures of empathy and concluded that while there are clear similarities between social interest and “some current views of empathy, there are also important differences” (p. 16). For example, taking another’s point of view is a form of empathy, but they characterized it as a narrow incomplete form of social interest. Importantly for the authors, the empathy scales they
reviewed were focused on here-and-now thoughts and feelings of empathy and not concerned with a future society, which social interest in their view necessarily encompasses. Finally, while they agreed that empathy as measured by the scales reviewed might predict some degree of social adjustment, it was not viewed as an overall sign of mental health, as social interest is seen to be in Adlerian psychology.

Third, the authors looked at literature that had been asking the question of whether an altruistic personality could be identified (Stasio & Capron, 1998). They did not so much distinguish the construct as question the validity of the scales that had been designed to determine whether such a personality type exists. They cited Batson (1987) as finding evidence that individuals were actually motivated by egoism and living up to their own self-image. They criticized another model as unclear as to what it is measuring. They also looked at the work done by Penner and his colleagues (1995) and concluded that certain characteristics found correlative for the prosocial personality (e.g. egoistic motivation and high dominance) were not compatible with social interest.

In conclusion the authors argued their review shows that social interest is a distinct psychological construct from other personality trait theories and from empathy, altruism and prosocial behavior. As such they urged further study to better understand social interest as a distinct and important personality construct (Stasio & Capron, 1998).

**Measuring social interest.** Now having some idea what social interest is and understanding that it is a good thing to have more rather than less of it, the next logical question is: How to measure how much social interest an individual has?
The SIS. Crandall (1975) looked how one might go about measuring how much social interest one has and began developing a scale for social interest. He started with Ansbacher’s preferred definition of social interest as an “interest in the interests of mankind [sic]” (1968, p. 148). Crandall hypothesized that the empirical question to be answered was “whether or not social interest is associated with an optimistic, affirmative attitude toward life in general” (1975, p. 187).

According to Crandall, Adler intended thinking, feeling and acting to be included in the concept of social interest. Crandall included empathetic understanding of others as a part of Adler’s conception of social interest, along with common sense, a positive regard for others, a concern for the welfare of others, and showing true sympathy. Crandall also included overt behaviors that show contributions towards the welfare of humanity as indicators of social interest. All of these items guided the design and development of Crandall’s self-report measure and scale.

The instrument known as the Social Interest Scale (SIS) requires individuals to make choices concerning which of two paired values they consider to be more important as personal characteristics. One value is closely related to social interest while the other is less so. Initial research with the SIS was promising. A later pair of studies looking at cooperative and helping behaviors in light of the SIS provided further validation of the scale (Crandall & Harris, 1976).

Peak experiences and ethical development. One group of researchers (Christopher, Manaster, Campbell, & Weinfeld, 2002) sought to explore the relationship between Maslow’s description of peak experiences, ethical development in terms of Kohlberg’s stages of moral
reasoning, and Adler’s notion of social interest. In doing so they administered five separate instruments (including the SIS) to 112 study participants.

These researchers described Maslow’s conception of peak experiences as transcendent experiences in which individuals come to understand themselves and their roles in society and the universe. One aspect of the peak experience is self-actualization, one dimension of which according to the authors is “some sort of ethical transformation” (p. 36). Interestingly Maslow himself described self-actualization using Adler’s concept of Gemeinschaftsgefühl.

This word [Gemeinschaftsgefühl], invented by Alfred Adler, is the only one available that describes well the flavor of the feelings for mankind expressed by self-actualizing subjects. They have for human beings in general a deep feeling of identification, sympathy and affection … Because of this they have a genuine desire to help the human race. It is as if they were all members of a single family. (1954, p. 217)

The researchers in this study considered ethical development from two different vantage points. First, they followed the then dominant approach of assessing moral development by equating ethical development with moral reasoning in the Kohlbergian tradition (Kohlberg, 1981). However, because existing measures of moral reasoning (e.g. the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1986)) had been criticized as relying too heavily on justice and rights and too little on emotion and relationships (Gilligan, 1982) the researchers looked for other measures as well. They concluded that within Adler’s definition of “social interest there existed an ‘innate potentiality’ for deep identification and empathy with the universe” (Christopher, Manaster, Campbell, & Weinfeld, 2002, p. 38) and this provided a good second way in which to assess
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ethical development. Therefore they relied on the SIS and the Tavis Measure of Social Interest (TMSI) (1990) to assess social interest.

The results of the study provided mixed support for the hypothesis that peak experiences are related to ethical development. Moral reasoning, as measured by the Defining Issues Test, was not found to relate to either peak experiences nor to social interest. Peak experiences seemed to be positively related to social interest when social interest was measured by the TMSI but was not found to have a positive relationship when the SIS was used to measure social interest. The researchers concluded additional study was warranted to better understand the interplay of peak experiences, social interest and moral development. They suggested including ways to assess behavioral assessments of moral development and social interest, such as volunteer work, charitable and philanthropic contributions and recycling.

A meta-analysis. Recognizing one major challenge to objectively measuring social interest is its multi-dimensional nature along with the natural human tendency to try and look good for the tester, one group of authors summarized the research concerning five social interest instruments (Bass, Curlette, Kern, & McWilliams, 2002). The study summarized findings related to the five social interest instruments going back to 1977 with a total sample size close to 19,000. The purpose of this meta-analysis was to summarize the correlations of the research findings between the various instruments and with other psychological constructs.

In analyzing the data the researchers found that even though each of the instruments used in the study purported to measure social interest there were few correlations of significance when the instruments were paired for analysis. According to the authors this was the most important finding from their meta-analysis because it shows a lack of clarity as to what psychological
construct is being measured by each of the instruments (i.e. how should Gemeinschaftsgefühl be translated?) They suggest that “recognized authorities could form a panel of experts for the purpose of establishing specific dimensions of the social interest construct” (Bass, Curlette, Kern, & McWilliams, 2002, p. 22), although they allow as there might be multiple definitions as there are of other psychological constructs.

**Master of our experiences.** Adler believed that “we make our own experiences” and that “everyone is master of the way in which he [sic] utilizes his [sic] experiences” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, pp. 211-212). Thus, while a great deal of emphasis is placed on the social and community aspect of life in Adlerian psychology there is room for contemplation of the self. Of course because Adler believed that humans are innately social creatures who are embedded in relationships (Carlson, Watts, & Maniaci, 2006), this contemplation generally takes place in some relational context. From caregiver-child attachment, to neuroscience, to examining how one fits into the world of therapy, exploration of the self is a part of building the Adlerian Archetype.

**Sense of Self**

Krebs (1974) described the self as the culmination of an evolutionary phenomenon that has at its base physical, biological and social processes. It is both of “a higher order of complexity than that of other natural phenomena” and a result of an “underlying process governing the outcome [which] is not seen as fundamentally different” (p. 190). Krebs notes that from the earliest age an infant is both the artist and the canvas, for just as an infant’s mother influences it, the mother is equally impacted by the child. According to the author: “The pattern
of mother-child reciprocal interaction may be viewed as the prototype of continuing succession of interaction sequences which serve self-evolution” (p. 181).

**Neurobiology and the self.** Three decades of neurobiology advances have come to pass since Krebs (1974) was making his observations and Siegel and Hartzell had the advantage of those advances in writing *Parenting from the Inside Out* (2003). In this book Siegel and Hartzell relate in greater detail how all mammals have evolved limbic circuitry in the brain to help them understand the internal emotional states of others. Because the book focuses on parenting they discuss the fact that the relationship between emotionally well-parented children and their parents is particularly strong and that appropriate empathic connections between them can lead to optimal attachment scenarios.

In a later publication Siegel (2007) discusses the concept well known to Adlerians that each child in a family, even identical twins, has a very different experience and that this experience shapes who that child becomes as an adult. His point is that it is not nature *versus* nurture, but rather nature *and* nurture combined that form the individual. Siegel describes it as children’s minds having recursive features in that what they present to the world can be reinforced by their very presentation because of the behavior they invoke from their caregivers. In Adlerian terms we are both the artist and the canvas.

More recently Siegel has been writing and speaking about the brain and interpersonal connectedness through mindfulness practice. His discussion often begins with the concept of mirror neurons that were first discovered by researchers working with monkeys in Italy, but were later found in humans as well (Siegel, 2007). Researchers found that when a monkey watched another person reach for and eat a peanut the same motor neurons fired in the monkey’s brain as fired
when the monkey itself reached for and ate a peanut. The exciting part of this research was that this type of neuronal activity only showed up when the activity was goal-directed. The activity that the monkey was observing on the part of the human had to be intentional for it to have the impact on the part of the monkey to cause activation of these mirror neurons. Siegel says:

As these mirror properties were discovered in humans by Marco Iacoboni and others, including the original researchers, Rizzolatti and Gallese, it became clear the human brain creates representations of others’ minds … At a neural level, we embed in our brains not just what we physically see, but the mental intention we imagine is going on in someone else’s mind. This is big news: Mirror neurons demonstrate the profoundly social nature of our brains. (Siegel, 2007, p. 166)

Carr and his colleagues (Carr, Iacoboni, Dubeau, & Mazziotta, 2003) expanded this research and looked at from a neurological standpoint. They demonstrated that mirror neurons not only can represent the intentional states of others, but also can mediate the basic mechanisms of emotional resonance that are fundamental to relationships between people (Siegel, 2007). The insula, as Siegel describes it, is a sort of information highway in the body. It responds to mirror neuron activation based on what an individual perceives as the emotional state of another and based on emotional resonance becomes attuned to that person—in other words feels empathy for the other person. Siegel (2007) believes humans can use any or all of our five senses to take in emotional signals from another person and our mirror neurons interpret these signals as intentional states, then our insula alters our limbic system and alters our bodily state to match that of the person we are observing. This attunement to the emotional state of another is empathy.
Of course, Adlerians have intuited for years what the science is now proving. That sharing of community is what shapes us. Siegel sums up some of the scientific research that back up this intuition: “Mirror properties of the nervous system provide an important window into examining the nature of culture and how shared ritual behaviors within our families, schools, and communities enable us to resonate with each others’ internal states, including intentions” (Siegel, 2007, p. 167).

**Holism.** Adler believed in the unity of the individual—holism being a basic tenet of Individual Psychology (Carlson, Watts, & Maniaci, 2006; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). In part this was because he believed that focusing on the parts rather than the whole causes one to overlook “the self,” and it was within the self that Adler found the true creative being.

Adler said: “In real life we always find a confirmation of the melody of the total self, of the personality, with its thousandfold ramifications” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 175). It is as if Adler was telling us that we cannot just listen to one note and hear what is magnificent about a symphony or look at one brush stroke and see what is spectacular about a painting. With clients if we focus on the symptoms, we miss their strengths; with people generally we may miss out on opportunities for great experiences by dismissing people too quickly because we do not like the first note we hear.

**Self-actualization.** Maslow (1954), who admitted to being influenced by Adler, also recognized the importance of self. His hierarchy of needs included at its highest two levels the esteem needs and self-actualization. The esteem needs include self-esteem or self-respect and recognizing their importance to human growth and development. Maslow credited these as
having been a focus of Adlerian psychology and as having been essentially ignored by psychoanalysts.

According to Maslow: “Satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world” (1943). The notion of being useful and necessary in the world and deriving satisfaction from being so was exactly what Adler described as social interest. And certainly the sense of satisfaction of the self-esteem needs that Maslow is describing sounds very similar to a mentally healthy individual, which is how Adler would have described someone with a healthy sense of social interest (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Maslow was appropriately recognizing Adler for his contributions to this area of thought.

Although he did not create it, Maslow is often given credit for the term *self-actualization*. This he described as: “… the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (1943). From those who reach this state, those who in 1943 he saw as the highest form of human existence he believed “…we may expect the fullest (and healthiest) creativeness” (1943).

Ansbacher reported that individuals with well-developed social interest and those identified as self-actualized growth-motivated individuals, showed a strong overlap in the objects for which they expressed concern (1968). He found this was similar to the findings of other researchers.

Durbin tells us: “Thyra Boldes once wrote of Adler that he was real, whether he was joking or serious, whether in private discussion or lectures, his real personality always seemed to
say, ‘Life is holy. Have reverence for life. Every thing which happens is important’” (Durbin, 2004). Perhaps Adler was someone who had reached Maslow’s final stage of self-actualization.

**Knowing one’s self.** In 1937 Dreikurs wrote an intriguing article in which he complained about a preoccupation with ego and self-observation without purpose. “Preoccupation with oneself does not necessarily bring forth an understanding of oneself” (emphasis original to author) (p. 13). Dreikurs was not suggesting that one should never be self-reflective, but rather that it takes courage and self-confidence to take part in the world. If seeking true insight will allow someone to help others then Dreikurs encouraged such work. But he saw that work as the work of looking at how one moves in the world and one’s relationships with others. Dreikurs believed self-understanding required “the soil of courage to face oneself” to grow and had to move “toward one’s fellow human beings, toward social consciousness” (p. 23).

**Questioning one’s self.** In 1972 Dreikurs provocatively titled an article published in the *Individual Psychologist*: Am I an Adlerian? Within the first paragraph he acknowledged the foolishness of the question while pointing out that some wished to label him a “neo-Adlerian” (p. 35).

From a theoretical point of view Dreikurs asserted that Adlerian Psychology is grounded in certain key concepts that one can assume are the shared beliefs of all those who call themselves Adlerians. To analogize from the theory, it is as if Dreikurs was saying there were certain core family values that all Adlerians hold. However, he argued that no one has the right to force others who use Adlerian principles to acknowledge they are Adlerians. This ultimate question is one he believed each person has to answer for him or herself.
It is notable that in 1972 Dreikurs identified Adlerian psychology as a movement or a political force. According to Dreikurs, declaring one’s self to be an Adlerian had greater implications than simply stating one’s theoretical orientation towards therapy, counseling or education. We will see that this was not a position held by all. Dreikurs articulated his role in the Adlerian psychology movement as attempting to bring a practical and clear set of systemized techniques that are “teachable, understandable and applicable” (p. 36).

**Staking one’s ground.** In a retrospective and prospective look at Adlerian Psychology in the spring of 2002, Harold Mosak addressed the NĀSAP annual meeting (Mosak, 2003). Mosak relayed concerns about the future of NĀSAP both based on its dwindling membership and his perception of its lack of focus and goals. He voiced concern that having changed NĀSAP from a professional organization of psychotherapists to a more inclusive organization or movement–as had been Dreikurs’ dream–had not been healthy for the organization. In a tongue-in-cheek manner Mosak also raised the issue of NĀSAP’s recent activity of awarding certification of Diplomates in Adlerian Psychology. He said it was “no longer a question of whether you are an Adlerian or not, but rather how much of an Adlerian you are” (p. 6).

In that speech Mosak declared he was an Adlerian because it helped him to see the world more clearly and not to have to force his observations to fit them into Adlerian Psychology. He said however he did not believe that Adlerian Psychology is “THE TRUTH” and that as such he felt no need to defend it or to denigrate the theories of others. He stated he believed it only necessary to subscribe to the basic tenets of the theory and not engage in practices that are antithetical to those basic assumptions. That was his one stated boundary–there must be no violation of a basic assumption of Adlerian psychology in any technique he used.
Defining one’s self. Over thirty years after Dreikurs wrote his article another noted Adlerian took the podium and addressed the NĀSAP conference using the same title previously used by Dreikurs: Am I An Adlerian? (Bitter, 2007). While Dreikurs described himself as “a ‘true’ Adlerian” (1972, p. 36), Bitter described himself as an “Adlerian integrationist” and a fourth-generation Adlerian (2007, p. 4). He chose the subject of his address because he said he had struggled over the years with being told by others that he was not Adlerian or that he did not do Adlerian therapy the right way. Bitter, a self-proclaimed disciple of Manford Sonstegard, stated his deep respect for Adlerian psychology but admitted “a fascination with the really good ideas of other thinkers in other models” (2007, p. 4).

Following Dreikurs’ lead, Bitter identified several foundational concepts of Adlerian Psychology. To Dreikurs’ (1972) original list: “holism, a teleo-analytic view of goal-directed behavior, self determination, significance of the lifestyle, social interest, inferiority feelings, early recollections, and family constellation” (p. 35), Bitter added the basic concepts of: “a psychology of use, not possession; life tasks and their assessment; and the unity of the personality” (2007, p. 4).

Bitter cited as amongst those outside the Adlerian community who had the greatest influence on him: Virginia Satir and Erv and Miriam Polster. From Satir he said he learned to “place nurturance at the center of my work” linking “social interest to the communication of emotional honesty and congruence” (2007, p. 20). From the Polsters he said he learned much about how to conduct here and now therapy in the Gestalt tradition with a softer and more humane edge than other existentialists (2007).
Bitter noted it has been suggested that because he uses so much of what he learned from Satir and the Posters he is not an Adlerian, but he disagreed with this assessment. He accepts the basic concepts of Individual Psychology and uses them as the foundation in his work. Bitter said that, like Adler, he believes in social equality and women’s rights. He, like Adler, believes “that making a contribution is the meaning you achieve in life” (2007, p. 25). Bitter declared that he is an Adlerian and as Dreikurs (1972) said over thirty years before, that should be enough.

**Knowing one’s place in the Adlerian world.** Declaring the two criteria of self-identity and allegiance proposed by Dreikurs (1972) and supported by Bitter (2007) was too simplistic for the real world, Sperry (2007) proposed an eight-way typology for identifying one’s connection to Individual Psychology. The categories are identification with the Adlerian approach and commitment to Adlerian concepts and techniques. The subcategories of identification with the Adlerian approach are either (1) self-identification or (2) denial of identification. The subcategories of commitment to Adlerian concepts and techniques are: (1) accept-conserv; (2) accept-adapt; (3) accept-expand; and (4) limited or none.

Sperry described the following typologies:

1. **Adlerian I** – those who identify themselves as Adlerians, acknowledge Adler’s contributions and are not generally interested in changing his basic formulations. He characterized the Ansbachers in this group.

2. **Friends of Adler** – those who do not self-identify as Adlerians (although some may have studied with Adler at some point), but who do acknowledge and incorporate Adlerian concepts and ideas. Maslow, May, Ellis, Glasser and Frankl are all in this group according to Sperry.
3. **Adlerian II** – these individuals self-identify as Adlerians, acknowledge his contributions, but see the value and need to expand, modify and extend the application of some of the principles. Dreikurs is an example of such an individual.

4. **Crypto-Adlerian I** – these individuals do not self-identify as Adlerians (at least not publicly) nor do they acknowledge his contributions to their work, but their own theories are very similar. Aaron Beck is an example of such a theorist.

5. **Adlerian III** – these individuals self-identify as Adlerians and acknowledge his contributions, but see the need for development and evolution of basic Adlerian principles if it is to continue to remain useful in the modern world. Sperry stated this is simply a historical phenomenon of any theory and that Adler’s own thoughts developed and evolved over the course of his work.

6. **Crypto-Adlerian II** – these individuals do not self-identify as Adlerians and do not acknowledge Adler’s contributions, however they incorporate modified Adlerian concepts and techniques into their work (e.g. Solution-Focused Therapy’s “The Magic Question.”)

7. **Nominal Adlerian** – these individuals self-identify as Adlerians and acknowledge his contributions, but their work involves concepts and techniques that are not compatible with the underlying philosophical approach of Adlerian Psychology.

8. **Non-Adlerians** – these individuals do not have any specific connection to Adlerian Psychology. Of course, Sperry is skeptical that any such counselor or therapist actually exists because Adler’s influence is so broad-based.

Although it is not part of his typology, Sperry noted that people have used the “curious” term “true Adlerian” (p. 134). Sperry referenced Dreikurs’ (1972) use of the term, declaring
without defining it that he is just such a creature. While Sperry concluded that defining what a “true Adlerian” is belongs to a professional organization (he suggested it is the province of NÄSAP) he nonetheless went on to indicate “five core assumptions” “that seem to support the Adlerian approach and differentiate it from others” (p. 134): (1) idiographic orientation, holism, and teleology or purposiveness; (2) human nature is neutral; (3) soft-determinism; (4) social meaning of behavior and striving for superiority; and (5) psychology of use.

Sperry “presume[d]” that anyone who falls in the category of Adlerian I, Adlerian II, or Adlerian III in his typology “would endorse the assumptions” (p. 134) he sets forth and therefore can in his opinion be considered a “true Adlerian.” Sperry included in the discussion a section in which he categorized Bitter’s theoretical orientation (an Adlerian III).

**Cooperation**

Seif (1976) argued that the life-philosophy of those with a will to personal power begets competition, which begets conflict. Conversely, changing one’s life-philosophy to a philosophy of cooperation should then bring peace. Through the use of case studies and parables Seif presents a case for Individual Psychology as an opportunity for changing one’s life-philosophy from one of a will to power to a philosophy of cooperation and happiness.

**Cooperative leadership.** Leaders are often thought of as take charge individuals who can command those in the rank and file to get the job done, but “[a] leader’s emotional tone can have surprising power” (Goleman, 2006). Frey, Kern, Snow, and Curlette (2009) looked at the extent to which the attributes of successful leaders identified by one model were similar to the attributes recognized as characteristic of social interest.
The model was designed to measure three types of leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire (Frey, Kern, Snow, & Curlette, 2009). The individual who designed the model considered transformational leadership the most desirable form of leadership because the followers believe in and respect those leaders. As such the authors of the present study focused on the leadership relationship dimensions identified as characteristic of transformational leadership attributes.

The authors described five clusters of leadership dimensions as follows: “a leader who is visionary, purposeful, and trustworthy;” “a leader who is able to motivate levels of performance in subordinates beyond their expectations;” “a leader who is empathic and listens to the needs of subordinates;” and “a leader who puts value on intellect, questions the status quo, and prefers reason over emotionally made decisions” (p. 216).

Comparing the research on transformational leadership with research on lifestyle as measured by the BASIS-A (Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993) the authors concluded that those who score higher on the belonging and social interest scales tend to have also have greater transformational leadership attributes, as did those with higher scores on the striving for perfection and softness scales. Those with lower scores on the being cautious and harshness scales tended also to have greater transformational leadership attributes.

These results are not surprising as Adler himself described the personal qualities of a leader as including a strongly developed sense of social interest, along with the following qualities: optimism; self-confidence; a capacity for taking quick action; someone who is willing to jump in and participate; an ease with people; tactfulness; preparedness and training (1958). In
Adler’s words a leader must be “a real human who possesses courage and skills” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 450).

The Courage to Be Imperfect

Dreikurs is credited with the phrase that has become so much a part of Adlerian philosophy “the courage to be imperfect.” In fact his biography bears credit to his authorship of the term: *The Courage to Be Imperfect: The Life and Work of Rudolf Dreikurs* (Terner & Pew, 1978). Certainly as a “true Adlerian” (1972, p. 36) Dreikurs recognized Adler’s belief in the innate human tendency to strive for perfection (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). For Adler, the drive for perfection was evolutionary not only from a biological, psychological and intellectual standpoint, but also from a societal standpoint. He believed that healthy human beings were innately driven to strive to perfect their communities through the use of social interest (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Of course, by urging that people have the courage to be imperfect Dreikurs was not disagreeing with Adler that individuals should engage in social interest on behalf of evolving on either a personal or community level. What Dreikurs was concerned with was what he saw as a growing preoccupation with individuals feeling the need to be “do right and to be right and to become perfect” (Dreikurs, 1957, p. 1). In his opinion right, wrong, and perfection are absolute judgments that require an arbiter who metes out justice when one does not live up to the required standards. Having moved away from autocratic to democratic societies such absolutes should have lost their meaning. Individuals are able to make their own determinations about what is right and what is wrong.
Dreikurs’ point was that many individuals had become concerned with being good as their approximation for what is right, but that they often seemed more concerned with self-elevation than with the welfare of others. Dreikurs said: “Anybody who is really concerned with the welfare of others won’t have any time or interest to become concerned with the question of how good he [sic] is (Dreikurs, 1957, p. 3).

As Dreikurs saw it our overly competitive society has made everyone afraid of making mistakes. Making a mistake may result in a lower status, ridicule, and humiliation. He cited the innate human striving for superiority. Individuals were comparing themselves to one another and feeling less and less superior over each other in society. Thus, by being cautious and not taking risks so as to avoid making mistakes individuals could protect themselves from showing their imperfections and lowering their status even further.

But Dreikurs pointed out that those who do nothing because they are afraid of not being right do nothing. They are not able to function.

… there is only one condition on which you can be sure you are right when you try to do something; to do right. There is one condition alone which would permit you to be relatively sure whether you are right or wrong. That is afterwards.

When you so something you can never be sure— you only see if it is right by how it turns out. (Dreikurs, 1957, p. 3)

Dreikurs’ remedy for this was to realize that we are good enough the way we are. That no matter how much we strive to know more, no matter how much more training or experience we acquire, no matter how much wealth we have, we must make peace with ourselves. And that, according to Dreikurs, requires the courage to be imperfect.
Adaptive imperfectionism. Although Stolz and Ashby (2007) did not mention Dreikurs, they referenced Adler’s concept that perfectionist striving is an innate human characteristic that can take on both normal and neurotic forms. These authors set out to look at personality differences among perfectionists and nonperfectionists. Within the category of perfectionists they followed the subcategories that had been earlier suggested by Hamachek (1978). “Normal” or adaptive perfectionists put intense effort into their achievements, but are able to tolerate imperfection without harsh and critical self-reflection. Maladaptive perfectionists tend toward the neurotic inability in which they constantly drive themselves to believe that nothing they do is ever good enough.

Previous studies showed that maladaptive perfectionists generally had greater feelings of inferiority (Ashby & Kottman, 1996), but failed to show that they had lower social interest (Kottman & Ashby, 1999). The authors hypothesized significant differences in “lifestyle themes would be obtained for adaptive perfectionists, maladaptive perfectionists, and nonperfectionists” (Stolz & Ashby, 2007, p. 415).

The results of the study were consistent with the authors’ hypothesis that there is a multidimensional nature to perfectionism. They concluded adaptive perfectionists work well in cooperative environments and tend to seek out cooperative relationships rather than feel they must take on leadership roles for self-esteem reasons.

Open Heart and Humble Inquiry

It has been said of Adler that he was like “a kindly old grandmother” (Stein H. J., 1991). Others have reported that he spoke with the gestures of a “completely unselfconscious person” and appeared as “some simple, companionable person with whom one feels immediately at home...
... a man whom one feels immediately ready to give one’s confidence” (Gray, 1937 as cited in Ballou, 2003). Moore has said of him “If Adler had destructiveness within him, he held it beautifully in control” (Moore, 1954, p. 1). She tells us that Adler liked people and that is unaware of his having any prejudices. He was in her words “the personification, the human embodiment of the open mind and the open heart” (p. 4).

Stein (1991) has described Adler’s style of inquiry comparing it to the great Greek teacher Socrates. Stein finds the following general similarities between Adler and Socrates: courage; sociability; committed to the search for truth through reason; tact; wisdom; humility; eloquence; patience; a reverence for freedom, responsibility, courage and inner integrity; an ability to see humor and irony in situations; and a desire to help others understand their values and beliefs. Other similarities include: maintaining the role of a cooperative co-thinker; not acting superior; and exploring the consequences of one’s actions.

The Interviews

On June 8th through the 12th, 2010, NĀSAP held its annual meeting in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area of Minnesota. Approximately 350 individuals attended providing an opportunity to conduct short interviews to learn what participants believed constituted the Adlerian Archetype. I was able to interview twenty individuals in-person at the conference. An additional seven individuals were interviewed by phone or through correspondence after the conference. Thus, qualitative data from twenty-seven individuals was gathered and inform this paper. Both those who were interviewed in-person and those who provided written responses will be referred to as “interviewees” throughout this paper and the process of gathering the information will be referred to as an “interview.”
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Description of The Interviews

The interviews consisted of gathering brief demographic information (i.e. name, age, current or most recent occupation, and number of years exposed to Adlerian study/theories) and then asking the key question: “What does it mean to be an Adlerian?” Interviewees signed a consent form in which they also provided their consent to be quoted. The in-person interviews were recorded using Livescribe™ technology with a Pulse™ Smartpen (http://www.livescribe.com/en-us/), so that the interviews could later be transcribed. Data analysis of both the in-person and written interviews was handled in the same manner once the in-person interviews were transcribed.

Description of The Interviewees

The interviewees were sixteen women and eleven men. All but one of the interviewees provided his or her age at the time of the interview. Of the interviewees providing their ages, the oldest interviewee was eighty-six years old and the youngest was twenty-seven years old, thus the range in age was fifty-nine years. The mean, mode and median ages of those providing their ages were all fifty-one years. Of those who provided their ages, twelve interviewees were under fifty-one years of age and eleven were over fifty-one years of age.

The data regarding the number of years interviewees had been exposed to Adlerian study was far less uniform than the age data. In part this can be explained by the fact that several interviewees were students who had been exposed to Adlerian theory for only one to two years (the maximum exposure for the students and recent graduates was five years), whereas several other interviewees were experienced practitioners with decades of exposure to Adlerian theory. The most experienced practitioner had been exposed to Adlerian psychology for at least sixty
years, whereas the most inexperienced student had been studying Adler for just one year. The mean years of exposure was approximately nineteen years with the data showing two modes, one at two years of exposure and one at thirty years of exposure. The median years of exposure was thirteen years.

The women. The women broke down into three categories of exposure to Adlerian study. Five of the sixteen women interviewees (approximately 31%) had been exposed to Adlerian study for five years or less. At the other extreme, seven of the women (approximately 44%) had been exposed to Adler for between twenty and forty years. The remaining four women (approximately 25%) fell in the middle range, with between nine and fifteen years of exposure to Adlerian theory.

The men. Applying the same broad time periods as applied to the women (five years or less; five to twenty years; twenty years or more), the eleven male interviewees broke down into two categories of exposure to Adlerian study. Five of the eleven male interviewees (approximately 45%) had five or fewer years of exposure to Adler, while the remaining six men (approximately 55%) had been exposed to Adlerian theory for at least twenty years. Further refinement of this category of more experienced males shows that one of the six men has over sixty years of exposure to Adlerian study and two of these men have at least forty years.

Summary of The Results

A not surprising theme from the interviews was that to be an Adlerian is to live a life of social interest, but what this looks like is different for each interviewee. The uniqueness and creativity that Adler saw in human beings is certainly alive within the Adlerian community as
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evidenced by the variety of ways in which people approached answering the question “What
does it mean to be an Adlerian?”

Cooperation was identified as an important aspect of living in a socially interested
Adlerian manner. Adlerians are also known for connecting people to each other, helping others
to learn about Adlerian principles and guiding them to live by those principles as well. Adlerians
are also known for making meaningful contributions for the betterment of the world. Adlerians
try to live in harmony locally, nationally and internationally.

An educator and mother talked of feeling the need to help guide others, including her
own children, to make good decisions. One interviewee commented that Adler himself was
somewhat introverted by nature, but felt compelled to overcome this natural proclivity in the
name of community.

The interviews were lively, warm, and often humorous. People gave freely and
generously of their time and their thoughts. Interviewees expressed great pride in their
association with the Adlerian community and in studying Adler’s theories and carrying on his
legacy. One male summed up the sense of home that many of those with long association to the
Adlerian community identified. He said: [It’s] a place where you feel safe, secure, and loved,
and understood, and respected – not sure about admired – just respected, and cared for and
loved.” A sense of belonging, of community, of feeling “at home” was a common theme
amongst the interviewees.

**Striving to be Adlerian.** One theme that came across from some of the interviews is that
one strives to be Adlerian, but one is unlikely to find one’s self satisfied in having arriving at the
state. Some interviewees characterized being an Adlerian as being on a path of self-discovery. One put it this way:

… understand[ing] we have a beautiful quality as human being[s] to absolutely chose our attitude towards every situation we face. And how fortunate we are that whatever challenges come our way we absolutely will decide what attitude we’ll adopt to deal with them.

Other interviewees talked about how Adlerians are courageous in their imperfection and take risks in trying to understand, live and teach everything that Adlerian theory encompasses. This striving is not vertical. It is not an attempt to be better than others; as one interviewee said specifically to be Adlerian is “not to live one’s life better or worse than anyone else.” Rather, the interviewees generally strive to live lives of usefulness. “How,” as another interviewee said: “to walk the walk,” because “if I hold these beliefs then I have to live them.”

One interviewee believes that “Adlerianism is about how I treat people. You should treat others how you wanted to be treated. Unless we are not well, we want to treat others as we want to be treated.” This interviewee remarked in a variation on the Christian notion of turning the other cheek (Matthew, 2011): "You can eventually overcome a person who is ready is ready to do battle without having to do battle, if you just respond evenly and with respect."

**Everything can be different.** One interviewee related early life challenges. Rather than causing this interviewee to take on a self-pitying lifestyle, this person used those experiences to the positive:

When I was born I was born crippled. So I had lots of surgery over the years - the first 7 years of my life and stopped being crippled. So I learned from that how to
develop a sense of freedom in terms of living my life and the one thing I liked about being crippled was I always found a way to move around. In other words, if I couldn't walk I slid around. Upteen different ways to move around. So being crippled taught me a great degree of flexibility I would not have had otherwise.

**Encouraging.** Another hallmark of Adlerians is their encouraging nature. As one interviewee put it in describing her early experiences with NĀSAP:

I took one all day workshop on encouragement was one of my first ones and I came home and I remember my husband saying ‘What did you learn?’ and I remember saying ‘You know I don’t know what I learned, I only know that the topic was encouragement and what I learned was that you have to do it everyday.’

One interviewee, remarked on being an Adlerian before knowing what one was, said:

[Being an Adlerian is to] “value others, no matter how difficult and full of self-loathing they may be.” Another said:

Being Adlerian gives me a systematic way of thinking about people and my relationships and interactions with them. I think for me though the bigger thing is being encouraging and living in a space that is intentional with my impact on other people and I want that impact to be positive and optimistic. That seems to me to be what you do when you are Adlerian, you co-create with other people the relationship with them and you are egalitarian and not judgmental.

A student said being an Adlerian is about “collaboration and encouragement [and] equality in the therapeutic relationship.” An experienced practitioner said it is less about
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technique and more “about a way of being with people … respectfulness and cooperation and collaboration.”

A lens to view the world. Several interviewees noted that Adlerian theory gives them a viewpoint in which to look at human nature. One interviewee said that this framework from which to have a clear-cut understanding of other people brings him a sense of peace and joy. Others talked about how it provides a focus on what is possible instead of what is wrong. That it is a positive, optimistic way of looking at people that is curious and questioning rather than closed and judgmental. That it is grounded in mutual respect. That Adlerians try to treat others the way that they wish to be treated. One interviewee characterized this as trying to live up to the “Judeo Christian humanistic principles” and the “idea of communal interest.”

A general theme amongst the interviewees was that Adlerians generally try to reframe the negative into a positive. Adlerians are egalitarian. They “… feel respect for others, [try] to be on the same level, to get a positive understanding for peoples’ behaviour [sic] as their survival solutions.” Adlerians are “… carrying more for people, seeing easier the good parts in them, hoping they’ll change for their benefit …”

One interviewee with a long association with Adlerian psychology said Adlerians do not believe in simply sitting in the office and seeing clients, they are involved in the society in which they and the clients live and use this to help understand their clients. Another summed the Adlerian lens on the world in saying that Adlerians have a “firm, positive and encouraging foundation” to guide their personal and professional judgments. One woman described this lens as a “kinder perspective on life.” A student commented quite simply that to be an Adlerian is “to accept all people in their uniqueness.”
Flexible. Something that drew at least one interviewee to Adler and Adlerian theory was its creativity and flexibility.

What I like about the human condition is that you’re flexible; you’re constantly learning. You’re tuning into new experiences. It’s not ‘I’m an old man, I can’t learn’—learning is always there. One of the things that keeps you young is that you like learning; because it gives you the flexibility of change; because at every point in life there has to be change. … But the thing is you have that flexibility, have good time until you kick the bucket.

One interviewee related how after her early exposure to reading *Children: The Challenge* (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964) she realized that it could be applied to more than just child rearing, it could be applied to relationships with significant others and friends for example. This left her wanting to learn more because she understood the power of the theory.

Living the principles. Certainly social interest is the thing for which Adlerians are most well known. One interviewee said that to be Adlerian is to apply social interest to daily living, both professionally and personally. Another believes that to be Adlerian is to live the theory as a way of life.

The women. It was extremely common for the women interviewed, particularly those with long exposure to Adlerian theory, to personalize the answer to the question “What does it mean to be an Adlerian?” Many commented along the lines that to be an Adlerian means to “live your life according to Adlerian principles.” One woman with long experience as an Adlerian therapist related that to her it meant being encouraging and “living in a space that is intentional with my impact on other people. And I want my impact on other people to be positive and
optimistic.” Another said: “So, I think what it means to be an Adlerian is fundamentally to become a better person. A better friend. Definitely a better mother. And hopefully a better partner.”

One woman with long exposure to Adler said:

So, what’s it mean to be an Adlerian would be that once you understand the concepts then you either have to do it—meaning learning that equality and respect and cooperation—you have to do those things with your kids and your spouse and your friends and your fellow workers or you have to figure out why you’re not doing it. What’s in your head that interferes with you’re not being able to do what you’re supposed to do.

This theme of responsible living resonated with other women. As another woman with long exposure to Adlerian theory said:

To me being an Adlerian means to understand the principles of Adlerian psychology and to share those principles for the betterment of society … and to live the principles of Adlerian psychology. I think to be an Adlerian is also a responsibility. Because if you believe in the principles, you have a responsibility to make a meaningful contribution to the community to make this world a better place. And to help others both to understand it … I think there is a responsibility to bring others … encourage others, to learn about it.

A female interviewee who fell into the “middle” category of experience with Adlerian study (twelve years) came right out and said that “being an Adlerian is a way of life; a way I experience life.” She reflected on being encouraging, respectful, fair, loving and helpful. Her
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belief is that “Being an Adlerian is walking the walk. If I hold these beliefs then I have to live them.”

These concepts seem to have been passed along to those women with less exposure to Adlerian theory. Those with five or fewer years of exposure to Adler commented: “Adlerians create relationships based on social equality. They promote a sense of acceptance, belonging, encouragement, and endless possibilities.” “To be an Adlerian is looking way beyond yourself, it's looking at the community.” “Being more human, carrying more for people, seeing easier the good parts in them . . .”

The men. The male interviewees tended to focus more on the professional and intellectual aspects of what it means to be an Adlerian. The more experienced male interviewees were less likely to mention living the principles as being part of being an Adlerian. One interviewee with long exposure to Adlerian theory said “Certainly there wouldn’t be many Adlerians if it meant we had to be acting like Adlerians. So, when you ask me that it occurred to me it isn’t always what you do. Hopefully you strive for it . . .”

The men who did mention the personal aspects of being an Adlerian often put it in terms of on how it gives them a sense of belonging. As one man put it:

Now personally what Adler means to me is that I have a wonderful family, of people of like and I have always believed that like attracts like. So it is wonderful to know that there are all these wonderful people who are like me. And that creates a sense of welcome and joy. And I look forward to meeting other members of the Adlerian family in my personal life. What I also use in my personal life are those wonderful principles, techniques and interventions so that I
have a satisfied and rich love, work, social, spiritual and … five tasks of life. Joy
in each task of life.

The comments from this male interviewee indicate a sense of comfort and internal focus
as very important in his answers. This sense of the Adler community as a sense of “home” and a
place of comfort was a common theme from both male and female interviewees. (e.g. “A place
where you feel safe, secure and loved and understood and respected;” “It's the first time in my
life when I went to the Institute that I felt like ‘I'm home.’” “Did not feel like I fit as a kid-This
theory was such a fit it was like finding a home.”)

Another male interviewee who mentioned a personal aspect to being an Adlerian (e.g. “a
firm foundation to guide personal life choices”) represents a sentiment similar to those made by
the women, albeit with far less detail and no specific mention of relationships or daily living. It
is difficult to discern whether his focus is on the responsibility to use Adlerian principles to make
the world a better place and maintain relationships, or if his comment was directed at Adler
providing him comfort in guiding his life choices. What is notable is that his comment did not
include just “personal life choices,” but included “clinical judgment.” The exact quote was: “To
have a firm foundation to use to guide your personal life choices and to guide your clinical
Thus, we find specific and added emphasis on the professional rather than just the personal
aspect of being an Adlerian by this male interviewee.

In fact, the male interviewees were more likely to focus on the professional aspects of
being an Adlerian. Those with the most experience with Adler focused on this aspect to the
greatest degree. Being an Adlerian was described as having a “flexible mode of approaching
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patients from which to create idea rather than a locked system;” as having the understanding
“that misbehavior and poor mental health are almost always compensations for a sense of
inferiority;” and that as a family doctor Adler was a good role model to someone who described
himself as a family practitioner. The Adlerian system was described as being adaptable to “a wide
range of behaviors rather than being fixed in a rigid system of how to do therapy … you can use
it creatively and figure out how to be free.”

The male interviewees with less exposure to Adler (students and recent graduates) were
more likely to mention the personal social interest aspects of being an Adlerian at some point
during the interview. Perhaps this is as a result of having had some of the experienced women
interviewees as their instructors and mentors, or perhaps their reasons for choosing to pursue an
Adlerian education is that they hold a predisposition towards living the principles of social
interest in their personal lives. However, even for these men the professional aspect always
followed close behind:

The biggest thing it means is to have an aspect of social interest and apply it to
daily living, both your personal and professional life. I think that’s my biggest
thing, everything else goes along with that, like having empathy, really looking to
help the client and really integrate the client to becoming a whole person in a
positive … using positive and encouraging methodologies.

Another said:

Being an Adlerian informs my world view with its emphasis on Social Interest …
it also informs my therapeutic approach with its emphasis on all healing taking
place within a social context: Collaboration and encouragement; equality in the
therapeutic relationship; and recognition of the cognitive schema as the cognitive
focus for healing. Above all, I find Adlerian theory compatible with all of the
healing theories I embrace, giving me an “umbrella” theory to practice within.

More about the women. It would be a disservice to the women interviewees who are
educated, dedicated professionals to imply they did not mention the professional aspects of being
an Adlerian. In many cases the female interviewees talked specifically about how they applied
Adlerian principles to their practice, teaching, counseling, coaching or other work. In other cases
it was clear from the context of their answers that they had so integrated these principles into the
fabric of their being that there was no question that Adler was a part of their professional lives as
much as he was a part of their personal lives.

Implications of the difference. Is there something worth investigating in the difference
in the answers given by the women and the men that may awaken an old debate in a new arena?
In 1982, Carol Gilligan published In a Different Voice, challenging her colleague Lawrence
Kohlberg (1981) and his theory of the stages of moral development. Her criticism of Kohlberg’s
failure to include interviews of girls in his study caused many to question whether his
conclusions held true for females.

Kohlberg’s work was based on studies involving interviews of seventy-five boys.
According to Kohlberg, his studies showed normal moral development proceeds through six
distinct stages. In Stage One morality is based on rules imposed by external authority figures
that tell children what rules they must obey in order to avoid punishment. In Stage Two different
views of right and wrong come into awareness and some hedonistic pursuit of individual
interests comes into play. During Stage Three individuals identify with the importance of family
and community expectations and behaving in “good” ways (e.g. virtuously, lovingly, compassionately). But by Stage Four of the Kohlberg model individuals become more broadly concerned with society as a whole and are worried about obeying laws, respecting authority, and performing one’s duties in order to maintain social order. According to Kohlberg, those who reach Stage Five will ask the more philosophical questions about what makes a good society and what rights a society should protect. Finally, at Stage Six the highest level of moral maturity is reached wherein an individual obtains a universal conception of justice based on a sense of hierarchical, universal ethical principals with autonomy as the first impulse.

Kohlberg divided the six stages into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. In the pre-conventional stage an individual’s sense of justice is based on the needs of the self, in the conventional stage it derives from an understanding of society, and in the post conventional stage it becomes even more principled because the idea of good is universal (Gilligan, 1977). Gilligan’s criticism of Kohlberg was that by ignoring the female “voice” in developing his system he created inherent flaws that set up women to fail (1982). The Gilligan-Kohlberg research world was about moral dilemmas, and as Gilligan saw it, a “woman’s perception of self is more tenaciously embedded in relationships with others and women view moral dilemmas as highly contextual” (1977, p. 482).

Gilligan questioned the validity of Kohlberg’s model based on the transition from Stage Three to Stage Four. Women continually “tripped up” when they were tested and regularly did not transition to Stage Four as expected—more accurately as men did at the same stage of development. Research showed that girls reached Stage Three sooner than boys, but then tended to stay there, whereas boys eventually moved on to Stage Four (Gilligan, 1977). Gilligan
became convinced that this was not a finding of developmental inferiority in the girls, but rather an artifact of the way in which development was measured.

Gilligan’s biggest criticism of Kohlberg: that measuring women by a model that was designed by testing only on male subjects is valid. But it was her speculation as to why males and females tested differently that is of interest here. Gilligan argued that girls and women demonstrated a different type of reasoning than boys and men. Kohlberg defined progress toward moral maturity through justice, fairness, and universal rights (Derry, 1999). Gilligan believed that this perspective represented the male voice, but that females spoke about morality based on caring for and responsibility towards others, rather than justice (Gilligan, 1982). For Gilligan the feminine voice was one based on “the continuity of interdependent relationships” (Derry, 1999, p. 6) and she saw it not simply one of Kohlberg’s stages of moral development, but as a different way of resolving moral dilemmas.

The Kohlberg-Gilligan debate went on for many years and drew in many other researchers and authors. In later publications Gilligan revised her position, but did not change her initial position that Kohlberg’s model was inherently gender-biased. Wark and Krebs (1996) designed a study to look at as many different permutations of the debate and the critics of both Kohlberg’s and Gilligan’s theories as possible. A significant piece of their research was to look at whether one of the gender differences that was showing up in the research findings was a tendency for females and males to report different kinds of moral dilemmas (i.e. those that by nature would either be more care-based or more justice-based).

The research by Wark and Krebs did not support Gilligan’s claims about gender differences with regard to Kohlberg’s stages of moral maturity. They conclude by saying that
their findings show that the relationship between moral reasoning and moral orientation is more complex than Gilligan thought. The importance of their research however is not in the findings about moral judgments, but in an artifact of their study design. Wark and Krebs were interested in obtaining information about both moral dilemmas directly from the study participants and recording the type of dilemmas reported based on the gender of the participant. When asked to consider a real-life moral dilemma female participants were more likely to report pro-social dilemmas than male participants; males were more likely to report anti-social types of dilemmas. Once they controlled for this all gender differences in moral reasoning fell away. Similar results were obtained in a research study conducted in Finland (Juujarvi, 2005).

So, is there a gender-based difference in how individuals look at the world or simply a difference in how they communicate what they mean? Further research by Wark and Krebs (2000) has not really answered this question, nor did the Finnish research. But that research, like the original work by Kohlberg and Gilligan, was focused specifically on moral reasoning. If one takes a step back from the specific context of the research, what can be learned from Gilligan that might be important here?

Gilligan’s premise was that the women and girls whom she studied defined themselves according to their relationships. They saw themselves in relation to the world, based their self-esteem on the quality of their relationships, and placed a high priority on caring for other people—often judging themselves based on their ability to help alleviate another’s suffering (Kaplan, 2003). Gilligan perceived the female voice as one that described an interdependent community of relationships.
How different is this from the way in which the women interviewed in this study describe the Adlerian Archetype? Their focus was on: “my impact on other people;” “having a responsibility to make a meaningful contribution to the community to make this world a better place;” “you have to do those things with your kids and your spouse and your friends and your fellow workers;” “to become a better person. A better friend. Definitely a better mother. And hopefully a better partner,” etc. The focus was on relationships and society, which is exactly the ethic of caring that Gilligan found in her interviews with the woman and girls she interviewed for completely different purposes.

**Questions and implications.** Is there a difference in how the male and female interviewees describe living the principles? Or is this a post-modern feminism distinction without a real difference? Did the sex of the interviewer somehow influence the women’s answers? Does the author’s own view of what it means to be an Adlerian and her own concept of social interest, combined with her sex influence how she views the responses? Is the population size simply too small, not random enough, or drawn from too homogeneous a pool?

This study cannot answer the question as to whether there is truly a difference in how men and women view living the principles of being an Adlerian. It cannot even answer the question as to whether men and women simply articulate what it means to live the principles differently. However, particularly when considered in light of the work done by Gilligan and those that followed her, it does raise interesting questions worthy of further study by the Adlerian community.

**Developing Ego Identity Through Adler**
Does “being an Adlerian” have long-term lifestyle implications? Does “being an Adlerian” affect how one approaches life’s challenges? Are there life-long developmental implications associated with Adlerianism? If so, one might expect that those with the longest exposure to Adlerian study and practice would describe the greatest degree of impact on their lives. One then must ask how to confirm whether this suspicion, preferably from a lens outside of Individual Psychology. Erikson’s (1968) theory of psychosocial development across the lifespan and the development of the ego identity seems appropriate for this exercise.

**Erickson’s eighth stage.** Of those who provided their ages, five of the interviewees fall into Erikson’s (1968) eighth stage of maturity (65 years and older), the period he referred to as “Old Age.” Erikson described two ends of an emotional spectrum he believed older adults reflecting back on life would feel: ego integrity versus despair. Having succeeded at meeting life’s challenges throughout life leads to feelings of wisdom and a sense of fulfillment at this stage, while failure results in feelings of regret and bitterness. Older adults who have led a meaningful life and made valuable contributions to society can look back at their lives with a feeling of integrity, contentment and fulfillment, while others who reflect upon their experiences and failures may struggle to find a purpose to their lives, fear death, and have a sense of despair.

Massey (1986) describes the successful individual in stage eight as having “contentment with one’s accomplishments” which “raises self-esteem and frees the person to encourage others with the wisdom derived from having lived fully” (pp. 73-74). He goes on to say that one who has failed stage eight suffers a sense of the lasting inferiority associated with such lifelong failures will despair in such a way that he or she will often devalue the self and others.
**Erikson’s seventh stage.** Of those interviewees who provided their ages, fourteen would fit into Erikson’s (1968) seventh stage of Middle Adulthood (40 to 65 years) the stage he believed was characterized primarily by work and parenthood (1968). Erikson believed that most of early life is spent in preparation for this middle adulthood stage. Again Erikson set up two competing ends of a spectrum: generativity versus stagnation. His contention was that during this period successful adults must create or nurture things that will outlast them. They can do this by having children, or by creating a positive change that benefits other people or makes a difference to society. Success during stage seven of life leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment. Failure results in shallow, self-absorbed involvement in the world. Anxiety can develop around people’s fear of inactivity and meaningless during stage seven.

During stage seven Massey (1986) describes a growing person integrating “increasing self-esteem through giving to others with expressing social interest as a personally chosen preference” (p. 73). One who has not “grown by giving” will develop a sense of meaningless, will not have a socially constructive set of values, and will gain either an inferiority or superiority complex such that the individual will be prevented from having socially “valuable and productive work and relationships” (1986, p. 73).

**Erickson’s sixth stage.** The remaining seven interviewees who provided their ages fell into Erikson’s (1968) sixth stage of Young Adulthood (19 to 40 years) (1968). This stage he characterized as primarily concerned with the job of building intimate loving relationships. The spectrum is described with success leading to strong relationships and failure leading to loneliness and isolation.
Ego integrity. The interviews would support the notion that those with the longest exposure to Adlerian study also generally provided answers that indicated they fit well within their Eriksonian development stage and fall on the positive side of the emotional wellness spectrum. There is, of course, the possibility that it is those who are well along in their Eriksonian development who are drawn to Adlerian theory. There are certainly limitations to the data in this small study that will be discussed below. However, I would submit there is sufficient evidence of a correlation, particularly in stages seven and eight to warrant further research.

Tribal elders. A theme that came through from the Adlerians who might be described as tribal elders in other cultures was they could all answer the affirmatively the question “Have I lived a full life?” Of those providing their ages, five interviewees fell in Erikson’s eighth stage. While they reported ages over 65, many of the stage eight interviewees were still leading highly productive and generative lives. These five individuals had been exposed to Adlerian theories between thirty and sixty years. Three of these individuals are still actively engaged in both practice and teaching.

One elder statesman reflecting back described his “sheer pleasure” in working as a psychologist coming to know and understand people. He said:

I figure I need two or three more incarnations as a shrink before I do something else. That's the fun of it. No matter how long we work we're always learning. … It's not "I'm an old man, I can't learn." Learning is always there. One of the things that keeps you young is that you like learning. … Now that I am ancient I have to think in different ways because I have to find ways that give me flexibility and movement and it has to be in keeping with the age and changing throughout a
little bit. But the thing is if you have that flexibility have a good time until you
kick the bucket.

Another shared some intimate moments about his and his wife’s life together and their
family. He talked about raising children together and related that he felt lucky and that he and
his wife had a special place in the world:

My wife and I are very lucky. I was born on the 4th of July. I have a special
place. She was born on Christmas Eve. We never had to struggle for specialness
in our marriage. We each had our specialness in our lives that we saw and
admired. Something about that we saw and it was there. It was there and it was
great and valued.

Another elder statesman who continues to consult, counsel and teach actively was
philosophical but poignant. He put it this way:

We know that we have a beautiful quality as a human being to absolutely choose
our attitude towards every situation we face. And how fortunate we are that
whatever challenges come our way we absolutely will decide what attitude we'll
adopt to deal with them. … Now to be able to live our lives in a way that makes
use of the positive attributes of those principles is a challenge, but God almighty
aren't we fortunate to have that opportunity to at least be aware … that if we
behave in ways that are consistent with those principles and making use of the …
capacity that we have [it].... increases the chances that we will live in harmony
with loved ones and others … both in local way and hopefully in a national or
international fashion. Amen.
Generativity. For those interviewees in the stage of middle adulthood, there was a positive sense of generativity rather than stagnation. Of the interviewees who provided their ages at the time of their interview, fourteen fit into Erikson’s seventh stage of Middle Adulthood. As the largest group of interviewees this group was also the most diverse in terms of their employment status and their exposure to Adler. The group ranged from having thirty or more years of exposure to Adler to just two years of study. There was a gap in the data of years of exposure to Adler between those who had been exposed for less than five years (two of the fourteen reported four years; two reported two years; one reported two and a half years) and the next lowest level of exposure that was reported to be thirteen years. Some of the interviewees were employed in private practice as psychotherapists, some were instructors, professors, clinical supervisors; other interviewees were students or recent graduates seeking employment.

In describing his view of what being an Adlerian means, one interviewee who has multiple roles professionally in education and private practice, as well as in his family, personified generativity:

There is a professional aspect of it and there is a personal aspect of being an Adlerian. The professional aspect of being an Adlerian is a belief in the principles and the philosophy based upon Alfred Adler and his descendants, his disciples. … Now personally what Adlerian means to me is that I have a wonderful family, of people of like and I have always believed that like attracts like. So it is wonderful to know that there are all these wonderful people who are like me. And that creates a sense of welcome and joy. And I look forward to meeting other members of the Adlerian family in my personal life. What I also
use in my personal life are those wonderful principles, techniques and interventions so that I have a satisfied and rich love, work, social, spiritual ... five tasks of life. Joy in each task of life.

One female interviewee described her view of being an Adlerian in the following terms, which personified a form of generative social interest:

I'm being part of creating a better world. Helping people improve their lives and feel good about themselves by changing their perceptions about events in their lives that didn't go so well or not the way they had hoped. It means being connected to a holistic form of psychology, which I believe is very important. I'm very interested in the mind, body, spirit connection and I think Adler really bridges that for me. It is one of the most powerful methods of healing that I've seen because it is using the power of the mind and the spirit to change reality and create a better reality for self and community. It's part of being connected to a [group] of like Adlerian people who care about thinking and doing things like social interest.

**Connecting.** Generally the responses from the seven interviewees who would fall into Erikson’s stage six would indicate they see themselves as working to develop close intimate relationships of various kinds. This group’s exposure to Adler ranged from just one year to as many as twelve years. Several were graduate students in the process of studying Adler but some were practicing therapists or instructors.
One woman, whose exposure to Adler was minimal but who appeared to have taken the messages to heart, reported that to her to be an Adlerian meant developing the following kinds of relationships:

To be an Adlerian is looking way beyond yourself, it's looking at the community, it's a very holistic approach … we talk about social interest, it really goes beyond that—it's reaching people and getting them connecting to others; moving them just beyond themselves—but to a greater approach to community and psychology and understanding. … I think the Adler philosophy really grabs the whole idea of bringing a community closer, keeping people connected, and keeping a healthier view of being involved and connected with others.

Another woman in describing her relationship to her husband and children said the following:

Being an Adlerian is a way of life; a way I experience life; seeking a sense of belonging in and for others … in my personal life it is being encouraging, being fair, being loving, being respectful, with my children helping to guide them to make good decisions; as a wife as I was reflecting on Betty Lou [Bettner]'s talk it is helping my husband feel fulfilled as a person, being loving and respectful.

How the interviewees are doing. While Erikson is known for having expanded psychoanalysis well beyond Freud’s stages of childhood development, he too was particularly concerned with and spent most of his time developing his theories around the stages of childhood and adolescent development (Massey, 1986). Here we explore whether exposure to Adlerian theory impacts those in the later stages of Erikson’s developmental stages.
Based on their responses the interviewees generally fall along the positive end of the Eriksonian spectrum in their respective stage. They are achieving appropriate milestones, if not flourishing. Those who fell into Erickson’s stage eight were still leading full lives at the time of the interviews even if they described themselves as “retired.” Some were still joyfully engaged in productive and generative activities from which they might have been expected to have retired by this time. All of the “stage eighters” had long exposure to Adler and appeared to be contented with the lives they had led and fulfilled as they reflected back on their experiences and the contributions they had made to society.

**Limitations.** As noted there is a “chicken and egg” issue involved as to whether those who might choose to study Adler (or attend a NĀSAP conference or respond to this interview) are those who would be furthest along in their Eriksonian development. Some additional limitations include: the sample size is small; there are numerous gaps in the range of exposure data; the population of convenience may well skew the results in unintended ways; interviewees were not specifically queried regarding their Eriksonian development nor was objective data collected to be used in comparisons; there is no control population, and the results described are based on the subjective interpretations of the author.

**Implications.** Despite the limitations described, the interviews provide strong evidence that “being an Adlerian” does have positive long-term lifestyle implications and can help one to approach life’s developmental challenges in a positive way. Further research outside of Individual Psychology, possibly incorporating some of the psychosocial developmental work of Erikson across the lifespan as was done here, seems appropriate.
Empathy and Neurology

As previously discussed Adlerians believe that social interest is the main criteria of mental health and involves the ability to understand and empathize with others (Ansbacher, 1968). The interviewees certainly agreed with this view.

The eldest interviewee was clear that therapists cannot simply be blank slates for their clients, but must communicate in order to enter their client’s world. “So I don't allow my students to just say "Um hum" as a therapist … Therapy is not just sitting there like a lump. Therapy becomes a lively active interrelationship between the therapist and the patient.”

The youngest interviewee used the language that is often attributed to Adler in defining empathy: "To see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another.” Another used the word empathy, while many used the terms social interest and encouragement.

One student said that being an Adlerian means accepting all people in their uniqueness. An experienced practioner referred to it as “a way of being with people.” She added: “it’s something we co-create, it’s something we do together. It’s not something we do to the patient.” Others said: “Adlerianism is about how I treat people; treat others how you wanted to be treated;” “the idea of respect for every individual;” “Sometimes, I feel that this is all about people, and how I feel others – related and not - being a part of me.”

Limitations. There are many limitations to this aspect of the study. Certainly one expects individuals who chose to enter the counseling and therapy field to have well-developed empathy, so it is not surprising to find strong empathy amongst the interviewees. All of these interviewees have some exposure to Adlerian study and there was no control group.
Furthermore there was a not quantitative measure of degree of empathy among the interviewees to determine whether the amount of exposure in some way impacted the amount of empathy an interviewee had developed (if such a measure exists).

**Implications.** Despite these limitations the kind of connectedness referred to by the interviewees is consistent with the neurological science described by Siegel (2007). Clearly these interviewees were expressing various forms of empathic connections to others. The words they used, the ways in which they saw themselves both personally and professionally, their descriptions of their feelings of connectedness within the Adlerian community all spoke of deep empathic resonance with others. The willingness that each interviewee showed in providing their thoughts and feelings for this study is also testament to the generous and empathic nature of these individuals. This kind of one-to-another connectedness is exactly the kind of hopeful interaction that Rifkin (2010b) says we need if the planet is going to survive.

**Discussion**

In the book *Emotional Intelligence* Goleman (1995) refers to Aristotle’s (350 B.C.E.) examination of virtue, character and the good life in *The Nichomachean Ethics*. Aristotle explores the challenges of managing our emotions with intelligence and our passions with wisdom. Goleman says:

> As Aristotle saw, the problem is not with emotionality, but with the appropriateness of emotion and its expression. The question is, how can we bring intelligence to our emotions— and civility to our streets and caring to our communal life?  

(1995, p. xxiv)
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Based on the information presented in this paper, the answer to this question is by expanding people’s exposure to Adlerian principles and creating more individuals who meet the definition of the Adlerian Archetype. We must take what is at the core of Adlerian theory, socially interested Adlerians, and ensure that we become more than a covertly influential force.

The Adlerian Archetype

At the beginning of this paper I said I would develop an Adlerian Archetype through use of the literature and the interviews. The Adlerian Archetype is the answer to the question: what does it mean to be an Adlerian? The authors of the references cited here and the wisdom of the twenty-seven individuals who gave their personal answers to that question inform the Archetype.

To be an Adlerian is to be: accessible; accepting; balanced; to belong; to be cooperative; to be caring, compassionate, collaborative, creative, and all the rest. There may be other terms that apply and some may argue that their favored terms are better descriptors of characteristics that do apply. I attempted not to duplicate terms that were synonymous with each other, yet to make sure that there was at least one word for every letter of the alphabet. To the extent the list is incomplete, there is work for future students of Adler to add to the Archetype. But the wonderful group of interviewees who shared their insights and whose thoughts form a major part of this Archetype have already contributed substantially to this work. Future work will be to expand and strengthen the gifts they have given us.

The Adlerian Archetype is an aspirational being. The characteristics described in Fig. 1 are my summary of the literature and the interviews. In all likelihood no one person displays all of these characteristics and certainly does not display them all of the time. There is evidence the interviewees generally have a good understanding of what the Adlerian Archetype looks like,
with those having the longest exposure to Adlerian theory having the clearest picture in their minds. It is also clear many of the interviewees do attempt to live their lives with the characteristics of the Adlerian Archetype very much in mind. Many strive to live these principles and embody these characteristics as a part of their daily lives.

**Implications.** The Adlerian Archetype is also inspirational. If as humans we are designed to be innately social creatures, and if our brains are inherently social organs, then a community of people aspiring to live up to the Adlerian Archetype is a positive thing. And based on the mirror neuron theory our minds then are inclined to pick up on the positive characteristics of others who are aspiring to be Adlerian Archetypes and begin to mirror those qualities ourselves. As the Adlerian community grows more and more people will acquire these socially useful characteristics.

But if Adler’s theories are so obviously sound, the message so robustly positive, and they have been around for almost a century, why do they remain a footnote in many mainstream curricula? Why is Oprah not featuring Adler’s ideas as a part of some self-help week? Has Nanny 911 ever talked about the goals of misbehavior or a child’s mistaken belief? What is keeping more people from adopting these behaviors into their daily lives and teaching them to their children so that future generations of Adlerians will thrive? With apologies to the tree, if an Adlerian publishes an article does a Cognitive Behavioral Therapist hear it?

Are Adlerians suffering from an identity crisis? Have the questions about: “Who I am?” “What I am?” and “Am I enough of whatever I am?” gotten in the way of making sure people were listening? Has a psychology that eschews labeling when it comes to mental health become
preoccupied with labeling when it comes to theoretical orientation to the detriment of its own relevance?

If there has ever been a time in history when the world needed Adlerians more it is hard to remember. There are crises from the environment to the economy, from healthcare and basic survival needs like food and clean water to global terrorism. Wars and violence are a regular part of our news diet and for those that live in some countries of their daily lives. As the world becomes a less friendly place and our awareness of its inhospitable nature becomes more obvious because of the media and the Internet, individuals who carry the characteristics in Fig. 1 becomes more critical. These individuals give us hope. They respond to those in need. They help bring and keep our communities together. They remind us to work together; keep us moving; and they help us keep our sense of humor. These individuals see those in pain and lend a hand.

The challenge is to take what we have learned and move forward. We know what we are. We know who we are. Now we need to continue to spread the word. The more people who aspire to the Adlerian Archetype the better chance our planet will survive. If we are going to bring civility to our streets and caring to our communities, if we are to have passions with our wisdom and manage our emotions with intelligence, who better to do these things than Adlerians? If this sounds too self-aggrandizing, perhaps it is time to harken back to our forebears and accept that we need the courage to be imperfect.
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Fig 1
References


http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html


WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN ADLERIAN


http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew%205:39&version=NIV


