

Research

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The purpose of this column is to address methodology, new developments in research, statistical tools, ethical issues, and research reviews. Potential contributors are encouraged to submit manuscripts to Guy J. Manaster, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Texas, College of Education Bldg. #504, Austin, TX 78712-1296.

Manaster-Perryman Early Recollections Scoring Manual: Findings and Summary

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Axiomatic to Individual Psychology theory and practice is the importance of early understandings of self, others, family, and the world to an individual's development and personality. Equally central for the practitioner to make sense of an individual's personality, goals, and intentions is the ability of the practitioner to gain entry to these early understandings. Adlerian therapists interpret early recollections for knowledge of early and enduring understandings and, thereby, individual personalities and lifestyles. The Adlerian belief in the uniqueness of lifestyle requires analyses that reflect that uniqueness, and early recollections certainly do that.

Recognition of the value of early recollections has not spread to the wider field of psychology. Ideas and techniques supported by case study, idiographic research, tend not to garner acceptance in the scientific community to the same extent as quantitative, empirical nomothetic research. Other personality and therapy theories have suffered similar skepticism, but Individual Psychology may have suffered more.

Although the very special qualities of early recollections and Adlerian theory may lose something in the process, it appears that some substantial efforts have to be made to convince others in the field of their value. And, in

this instance at least, it may be necessary to bend, in research design and strategy. Adlerian researchers may have to conclude that if they cannot beat them, they must join them, in some ways. In essence that is what we have done in trying to come up with a straightforward, obvious way of scoring early recollections to study group differences and similarities, group effects. In this column, we briefly review the development and uses of the Manaster-Perryman Manifest Content Early Recollections Scoring Manual (MPERSM; Manaster & Perryman, 1979) and analyze and critique its effectiveness in research to date.

Development of the Rating Scale

The MPERSM was developed for a study that “investigated the proposition that the manifest content of early recollections differentiates between persons choosing different occupations” (Manaster & Perryman, 1974, p. 232). The authors had examined previous early recollection studies and other variables suggested by the Adlerian literature. They produced a list of 79 variables on which a single early recollection could be scored. The list was reduced to include only independent, non-overlapping variables, culminating in 42 variables in the final MPERSM. The 42 variables fell into seven categories: Characters, Themes, Concern with Detail, Setting, Active-Passive, Internal-External Control, and Affect. Most research using the manual tested hypotheses differentiating groups, investigated similarities between uses or forms of early recollections themselves, or, predominantly, searched for expected differences between groups, although, for the most part, without directional hypotheses.

Reliability and Validity

Simplicity and reliability were primary aims in developing the manual. Thus all variables are scored on a straightforward, *present-absent* basis (except the cumulative variables, which are merely the sum of present scores in a category). Scoring reliability is, therefore, quite high across all published studies. Moreover, scoring manifest content, the obvious and clear material of a memory that, as suggested by Adlerian theory, does not need deep interpretation, makes for high scoring reliability.

Some researchers using the MPERSM employed only certain variables and/or categories in keeping with their studies' hypotheses or research questions. Others scored and employed all variables and categories even though the studies' hypotheses did not refer to all variables. Other, generally exploratory studies have used all variables and categories without a prior idea or mention of which variables might be useful.

Usefulness

We reviewed studies that compared groups using all variables from all categories of the MPERSM. The studies fell roughly into three types: those that compared persons with different occupations or occupational interests, those that compared persons with various psychopathologies with each other and with controls, and those that compared unlike uses and collection strategies of early recollections.

The six published occupational studies reviewed included comparisons of nurses and others (Fakouri, Fakouri, & Hafner, 1986); accounting, secondary education, and psychology majors (Hafner & Fakouri, 1984a); clinical psychology, dentistry, and law students (Hafner & Fakouri, 1984b); mechanical, chemical, and electrical engineers (Hafner, Fakouri, & Etzler, 1986); counselor trainees and clients (Marcus, Manaster, & Spencer, 1999); and medical technicians and nurses (McFarland, 1988). Across the analyses from the six occupational studies reviewed, significant differences were found between groups on all variables except Other Family, Birth of a Sibling, Misdeeds, Mutuality, Outside Neighborhood, Traveling, Outside Not Home, Passive Affect, and Neutral Affect. After eliminating the five summed, other, and unclear variables, significant differences were found for each of 28 of the remaining 37 variables in at least one and as many as five of the six studies. Significant differences were found between groups for variables in five of the seven categories of the MPERSM in four studies, and four of the seven categories in two studies.

The eight psychopathological studies reviewed were Chaplin and Orlofsky (1991); Chesney, Fakouri, and Hafner (1986); Elliot, Fakouri, and Hafner (1993); Fakouri, Hartung, and Hafner (1985); Hafner, Fakouri, and Chesney (1988); Hafner, Fakouri, and Labrentz (1982); Hafner, Fakouri, Ollendick, and Corotto (1979); and Williams and Manaster (1990). In these studies significant differences were found between groups on all variables except Siblings, New Exciting Situation, and School, that is, on 34 of the 37 labeled variables. As might be expected among pathological groups as varied as clients in general, alcoholics, three types of eating disorders, neurotic depressives, and paranoid schizophrenics, with so many variables on which significant differences were found, the number of categories in which there were significant differences were less consistent, ranging from one of seven to five of seven.

Comparing studies in which the researchers explored uses or collection strategies of early recollections, in contrast to the occupational and psychopathology group comparisons just mentioned, showed few if any group differences. For instance, the results of a study comparing early recollections given orally versus handwritten ones "failed to support the hypothesis that the method used to communicate ERs significantly affects the content of ERs

as measured by the MPERSM" (Allers, Katrin, & White, 1997, p. 345). In a study comparing hypnotized and nonhypnotized subjects, those in the hypnotic condition "generated more mother, misdeeds, mastery, mutuality, hostility, visual, motor and active themes" (Coram & Hafner, 1988, p. 475). The authors further compared these groups with subjects who had been exposed to an induction procedure but were not hypnotized and found the same increased productivity as for the hypnotized subjects. They concluded that the context, such as expectations for hypnosis, experimenter behavior, and/or the relaxed environment, may have produced that effect.

Summary

The MPERSM was intended to be straightforward and easy to use in order to investigate basic Adlerian tenets concerning early recollections in a quantitative empirical fashion. This review of studies conducted to date indicates that the manual has substantial reliability and validity. The considerable number of variables in the manual and categories of variables in the manual, which have shown significant differentiation capacities across a good number of subject groups, indicate the value and usefulness of this scoring scheme. Thus, it appears that the development of the MPERSM and its use in empirical research have been worthwhile ventures with implications for substantiating the value of early recollection study and use, for finding interpretable and meaningful differences between groups, and for providing some grounded, nomothetic direction for clinical, idiographic interpretation.

References

The reference list contains all articles, theses, and dissertations of which the authors are aware that are about, use, or refer to the MPERSM. Citations made in this column are asterisked (*). If you know of omitted MPERSM references, the senior author would greatly appreciate being informed.

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