

Steven Slavik

Abstract

Adler's basic perspective was that the individual was a unit whose motion imparted a meaning and direction to its components. However, these components had meaning and direction only as defined within the motion, not in themselves. The concepts of Individual Psychology can be taken as metaphors, ways of looking at the person, whose purpose is to present a different perspective or choice to the client. Cooperation is such a metaphor which aids the individual to examine new solutions to the difficulties of living.

The *as if* technique is a well-known, well-justified, and well-used method in Adlerian therapy in which the client acts as though a desired event, belief, or behavior were at hand (Carich, 1989). It is a focused way of rehearsing what a client may want to occur in life without experiencing the full consequences. The technique itself is useful and motivating because of the pull of immediate or distant goals to which acting "as if" may bring the client closer.

However, the idea of the *as if* has a broader meaning in Individual Psychology. The immediate or distant goals of an individual derive their significance from his or her final, fictive goal, an imaginative image of what the person would be as if perfect or complete (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). As well, according to Adler (1937), the idea of goal and other concepts used in Individual Psychology are *as ifs*; their use presents opportunities for a therapist to construe and use the world in a specific way, essentially through metaphors. The focus of this article is to explore the metaphors in Individual Psychology and how they enable the therapist to enter the subjective world of the client. This is not a practical paper on technique, nor is it explicitly about theory. It is about the attitude of the therapist and how the therapist thinks about and approaches his or her work.

The Current of Life

Adler (1937) wrote that the individual is a unit, a whole, and that to analyze this unit requires

disrupting the whole into parts and giving these parts man-made names. These parts are considered like a textbook definition and perceived in the special

view of the observer.... [But] these [parts] cannot be considered as static and cannot be separated from life. (pp. 774–775)

Not only did Adler include inherited talents, bodily influences, and environmental influences among these perceived parts, or “bricks” of life, he also included the inferiority complex and, by extension, one might assume, other concepts of his theory.

Fundamental to Adler’s thinking is the movement of life, the current: “These bricks in the current of life have meaning and direction, but these qualities are given to them only by the ‘style of life,’ which must be found as the moving unit” (1937, p. 776). Adler looked for a *directed, meaningful* flow of life that grasps and uses certain elements: “We have always been intent to resolve into movement what we comprehend as form” (Adler, 1979, p. 31).

Without the current, these bricks have no notable existence; rather, they exist only in use, and then only for a user. This description follows from Vaihinger’s statement that “the conceptual world is... subjective in its forms: Only the observed and the unchangeable are real” (cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 83). For example, in Adler’s thinking, IQ might not be a trait but a concept which a psychologist uses to summarize information *and nothing else*. Similarly, Adler (1937) asserted

I, myself, as the inventor of the “inferiority complex” have never thought of it as of a spirit, knowing that it has never been in the consciousness or unconsciousness of the patient but only in my own consciousness, and have used it rather for illumination so that the patient could see his attitude in the right coherence. (p. 776)

Thus, the inferiority complex, at least in Adler’s later thinking, is a concept used to summarize and present information to a client in immediately comprehensible terms: “You seem to act as if you are small and weak and can’t solve this problem.” The superiority complex might similarly be presented as “You seem to act as if you need to prove something about yourself, as if you were small and weak and need to show yourself and others that you aren’t.” These concepts may have little to do with a client and much to do with the therapist’s way of apperceiving, thinking, and communicating.

Metaphor and “As If”

A metaphor, according to *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* (1980), is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase denoting one thing is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy—or to *create* a likeness or analogy—between them where one has not been before. Any *as if* connects behavior or thinking with something else, frequently a motive, an intention, a purpose, or a goal, suggesting a likeness. Metaphors are interpretive and offer

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both the therapist and the client a way of understanding and apperceiving the client. Metaphors are a way of saying, "This person is like one I know or have seen in the past or like one I can understand in terms with which I am familiar."

Accordingly, the concepts of Individual Psychology might be taken as if they were metaphors, as *ifs*, exemplified by Adler's use of the notion of the inferiority complex. Given his focus on presenting information to the client, in current therapeutic terms they would be termed "reframes." They become ways of encouraging another to "stop and think" for a moment and to encourage a change in *meaning* and *direction* of movement.

The whole theoretical structure of Individual Psychology can be taken as a set of logically related metaphors with purpose, not to provide a set of theoretical constructs and propositions subject to verification, a clinical model, or a personality theory, but simply to provide a different perspective or choice for the client. If so, the attitude of the therapist shifts from one of an expert to one of a cooperative investigator. These points are not argued in a comprehensive way here, but a few examples of how Adlerian theoretical constructs may be taken as metaphors designed to influence change are presented. Then some consequences of such a position for counseling and therapy are shown.

As If

A few concepts are here recast as metaphors or as presentations of an individual as if his or her behavior or thinking were of a certain nature. Their purposes to confront and to motivate are explicit. The form in which they are cast is important, because they are attempts to communicate between one active individual and another.

Inferiority Complex: "It sounds like you're saying you feel too small and weak to..."

Neurosis: "It seems as though you are 'stuck' on having things a certain way, no matter what the cost."

Discouragement: "It appears to me that you've given up trying to help yourself."

Pessimism: "Could it be that you expect that whatever you try will fail?"

Safeguarding: "It looks to me as if you do that to make yourself feel important or worthwhile."

Apperception: "Could it be you see things as if..."

Courage: "It looks to me as if you're working hard to make it work."

Creativity: "You certainly appear to find many ways to do..."

Goal: "Something I think I see pretty consistently in what you tell me and what you do here is..."

Social Interest: "You act as if you feel pretty much at home/out of place in life and in the world."

In general, Adlerian theoretical concepts can be cast as guidelines to help therapists think about people in a consistent way and to help therapists present what they think to others. That is, these notions are useful ways to talk to people because they summarize and present information: The lifestyle becomes a cooperative fiction or working hypothesis. While this communication is vital, at the same time in therapy these metaphors confront individuals with opportunities to do something with the information (Shulman, 1971, 1972). In fact, they are known to Adler (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) as *junctims*, the pairing of unrelated ideas for the purpose of generating an emotional response and movement. In this case, the purpose of these metaphors is to initiate useful movement.

Viewed as metaphors, these concepts lose their reference to reified events or forces in people and even their use as constructs in a model or theory; instead, they become guidelines in understanding and communicating with others. They become guiding fictions, expedient means to an end. Kopp (1995) would call them therapist-generated metaphors. "Joe is discouraged," does not mean that "discouragement can be found in Joe," nor that "Joe has gone through a discouraging experience sometime during his life." Rather, it means that "It seems to me that Joe acts as if he's given up trying to help himself." To say, "Joe, you seem discouraged," is an empathic way to open doors to being with Joe. Joe may, nonetheless, not agree with the therapist and take the discussion in other directions.

The Metaphor of Cooperation

Because Individual Psychology is based on the premise that the basic task of life is the enhancement, if not survival, of mankind, the purpose of these communication guidelines is to increase the realistic cooperation of individuals in life. Adler (1937) claimed that

the more the individual is socially adjusted... the greater his efforts to cooperate and to contribute for the benefit of the community in developing himself for doing his best.... If the life and evolution of mankind in their final outcome really mean cooperation and contribution, then in the lapse of time all personal efforts and all mass movements are doomed, if not directed toward the welfare of mankind. (p. 778)

The effort to cooperate marks the orientation toward reality around which individuals are metaphorically oriented in a better-or-worse fashion through the adoption of fictive goals. That is, all fictive goals entail creative and imaginative efforts to apperceive the world as if it were an opportunity and resource to achieve one's goal.

The idea of cooperation is an ideal, an image “by which we appraise the individual... created only by considering its value and its usefulness for man in general” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 131). This ideal and its usefulness comprise Adler’s justification of therapeutic movement toward cooperation. Without this basis, other “growth” therapies proliferate, seeking the self-enhancement of the individual at the expense of the common good.

Counseling and Therapy

If one were to assume that all Adlerian concepts are frames to enable the therapist and the client to mutually understand certain issues, to enable them to come to some agreement, and to work out certain problems in cooperation, then the idea of the task of counseling and therapy would need revision. These concepts become ways to promote a modest attitude toward the client (Breggin, 1998), one that respects the other and acknowledges the relativity of one’s operating ideas.

Consider, then, a therapist who is as equally in motion as a client. One’s professional apperception of life is that cooperation enhances life, in particular the three tasks of life. The benefit one could offer as a therapist to others might be the discernment of difficulties to which certain activities lead in regard to reality. One understands, however, that this apperception is an interpretation of life, a metaphor: “We know that we are... predisposed by our philosophy of life, while others do not know that they always find what they have known before” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 199). Accordingly, the Individual Psychologist realizes that many creative approaches to the tasks of life are effective.

The Adlerian therapist’s vision of therapy includes changing the movement of a client through changing the *direction* and the *meaning* of his or her movement, and, thereby, orienting the client to act more cooperatively in the tasks of life. The therapist encourages the client to be more interested in cooperation and to discover its satisfactions, rather than to righteously withdraw from the tasks of life or to be aggressively righteous about one’s private solution to them.

Yet in this conception of therapy, the therapist cannot be looking for truth, because the therapist knows he or she has only an apperception of the client’s motion. The presumption that reality *demand*s or *requires* cooperation leads to “experts” on the useless side of life. Saying that reality demands certain actions provides an excuse for righteous expertise. Those therapists who acknowledge that their conceptions of reality as well as cooperation are metaphors can enlist actual egalitarian cooperation from others because they

cannot insist on being right and they know no single right way to live, only many difficult ways.

To enlist cooperation, therapists can demonstrate cooperation. To demonstrate cooperation, they need agreement rather than truth: "It seems to me as if you.... Do you agree?" Agreement is not necessarily verbal or conscious. Dreikurs's (1958) use of a "recognition reflex" is an elicitation of agreement. In Adler's (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) terms, it is through agreement that social interest is awakened. Little can be done cooperatively without agreement: Agreement is the initial consensus and contract on which further work together is based.

From some initial agreement, a focus on the consequences of behavior, the awareness and assertion of freedom of choice with sensitivity to others, and the valuing of individuality, talents, skills, strengths, and idiosyncrasies become more important than mere communication. The aim is, in general and as fully as possible, for the therapist to see and to appreciate the world through the client's eyes rather than to manipulate the client's life from an arm's length or to passively listen and understand; instead, the therapist becomes *involved* in the client's experiences, sharing his or her thoughts, interpretations of experiences, and feelings in a way which facilitates the client's awareness of himself or herself (Wong & McKeen, 1992).

Counseling and therapy then become two people running alongside one another for a while, changing their direction from moment to moment. The therapist is no longer a pillar of rectitude or authority, but someone in motion, perhaps with skills in joining with others, in thinking and talking on one's feet, and in convincing others that it might be smart to avoid the hole he or she sees in the road ahead.

One frequent experience in such therapy is that of the "right time" (Neukrug, 1998). One might, as is commonly done, provide a lifestyle assessment for a client and work to correct the basic mistakes of the lifestyle. However, this approach may be done in a way that presupposes the therapist as an expert and may ignore the "teachable moment." Frequently, a therapist can find a clear way to express a crucial thought when a client can accept the idea expressed. The therapist can analyze a client, but many times an apt description of an important characteristic is elusive until it can be heard. A lifestyle assessment can also be used as a working contract until the client creates and offers critical exceptions to the analysis.

In this conception of therapy, resistance happens when the therapist has decided that a specific direction is the right direction for a client to move in life. Resistance arises when the therapist notices that the therapist and client are moving in different directions and the therapist tries to rein in the client. If the therapist "runs with" the client and tries—to extend the metaphor a little further—to run in his or her shoes, resistance will not occur.

Conclusion

To define Adlerian therapy as a cognitive therapy or as a cognitive-behavioral therapy definitely diminishes the importance of the *as if* in Adler's thinking. In the broader conception of Individual Psychology as a metaphor therapy, Individual Psychology appears as a method based on the simple premise that life requires cooperation; talking therapy which employs metaphorical means engages the client and is effective in building cooperation (Neukrug, 1998).

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