

Two Hundred Cases in Retrospect

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The test of any theory lies in its ability to guide us when we are in the midst of a struggle with realities. No matter how logical a theory may seem, it is of no use unless it accomplishes a predictable result in operation. At the Beecher Consultation Center,¹ we have been proponents of the principles of Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology for many years because we believe that this approach brings more effective results than any other.

It is our belief that the experienced Individual Psychologist, using the concepts created by Alfred Adler, has the distinct advantage of being in a position to obtain significant and rapid progress in the handling of children with disability problems, behavior or educational. This is possible because of the particular contribution to the understanding and education of children which Adler made. Using his teachings, the Individual Psychologist can help the disturbed child and *his disturbed parents* to understand their mistakes and alter them in a relatively short time.

But, it is not enough to believe blindly in anything. With this in mind, it seemed advisable to review some of our work of the past to find out exactly what had happened. The following is a study of the last two hundred cases, just as they came for help. There has been no selection of those to be presented. The categories employed are those that suggested themselves on the basis of our interest in Adler's theories.

Referral Sources

The two hundred cases in this study were referred to our Center by psychiatrists, psychologists, pediatricians, social agencies, clinics and schools (public, private and parochial). The majority of the families referred were from the middle class economically with neither very

¹ The Beecher Consultation Center, formerly known as the Beecher Remedial Center, was established by Willard and Marguerite Beecher, Co-Directors, in September, 1947, in Brooklyn, New York.

much or very little money, although some cases were from the financially depressed.

Types of Problems Referred

Of these two hundred cases, the types of problems referred were: (1) problems of behavior or some unacceptable form of relationship either at home or at school or both; (2) problems in Remedial Reading, Remedial Math, or Remedial Spelling; and (3) problems of a general academic retardation nature—that is, failure in several or all academic subjects in school. The behavior problems as listed or outlined on referral were: tardiness, absenteeism, passivity, aggressiveness, delinquency (stealing, lying, destruction of property, abuse of other children, thwarting of authority), fears, night terrors, bed-wetting, food rejection, functional stomach upsets, frequent crying spells, temper tantrums, jealousy of siblings, lispings, stammering, tics and other facial distortions, clicking noises in throat, snapping of finger nails, head bumping, et cetera. The percentages of over-all types of cases referred were as follows:

Behavior Problems	36.0%
Remedial Reading Problems	47.5%
Remedial Math Problems	4.0%
Remedial Spelling Problems	1.0%
General Academic Retardation Problems	11.5%

It must be borne in mind that those cases referred as academic problems also had many behavior disturbances and relationship difficulties. And, conversely, those referred as behavior problems were children who frequently did not do as well in school as they might have done and sometimes required remedial help. In other words, all of these children were failing in *more than one area of life*. Adler said, "All failures are failures because they are lacking in fellow-feeling and social interest. . . . The meaning they give to life is a private meaning; no one else is benefitted by the achievement of their aims and their interest stops short of their own persons." (3, p. 8)

Policy Employed in Treatment of All Cases Referred

It has been the consistent policy of the Beecher Consultation Center to insist that one or both parents accompany the child each time an

interview is scheduled. It has been a further policy to see a child and a parent (or parents) only once a week for a one-hour interview. The policy of working with a child and his family is implicit in Individual Psychology. Adler said, "We must never treat a symptom or a single expression; we must discover the mistake made in the whole life-style, in the way the mind has interpreted its experiences, in the meaning it has given to life and in the *actions* with which it has answered the impressions received from the body and the environment." (3, p. 47) And so, the Individual Psychologist concerns himself with the total environment and the whole child—not only with the symptoms as outlined in the referral data. This is accomplished by the treatment of total family relationships; that is, by working conjointly with the adult or adults most immediately concerned with the child. In so doing, one finds that the majority of children referred for help do not *have* a problem but rather *are* a problem in the home or the school environment or both. One also finds that it is the adults in the environment who are confronted with the problem and need to change *first*.

It is, therefore, important to give parents enough insight so that they become willing to change their way of relating to the failing child and to discontinue supporting the child's neurosis. In this way, the mistaken equilibrium of relationships (stasis) may be disrupted and the child is placed in the position of needing to do something more useful than presenting problems to the adults in his environment.² Operating in this manner makes it necessary to allow enough time between interviews for the parents and the child to work at their own re-education process. It is for this reason that we schedule an interview only once a week rather than more frequently.

On arrival at the Center, one Co-Director works with the parent and the other Co-Director works with the child for the first three-quarters of the hour's interview. The last quarter of the hour is devoted to what is called a "Joint Conference"—including parent (or parents), the child and the two Directors of the Center. (Frequently, other siblings in the family are brought in and included in the parents' interview and/or the "Joint Conference.") The basic principles involved in these conferences are:

(1) To explain in the hearing of child and parent the mistaken relationships being made on *both* sides; mistaken attitudes and activities

² See "A New Approach to Remedial Reading" by Willard Beecher in *The American Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol. X, Numbers 1 & 2, 1952-1953.

on the part of child toward parent and parent toward child are explored to desensitize and alter; they are regarded as "honest mistakes" in understanding and nothing to be frightened about.

(2) To spell out the proper attitude that must be achieved so that all can cooperate in mutually helpful ways.

(3) To challenge the child "to be a help and not a burden" (Adler) at home and in school; and the parent, "to be a friend and not a servant" (Adler) to the child.

In their separate interviews, preceding the "Joint Conference," these same principles are applied on a more specific and detailed basis.

Average Number of Interviews

Treating relationships in the manner outlined above has proved to be a most effective technique. Our statistical review indicates how rapidly results are obtained using this procedure in conjunction with the teachings of Alfred Adler. It reveals that:

The Average Number of Interviews Required Were . 13.5

Age and Grade Levels

The age ranges of these two hundred children were from five years through seventeen years. The grade ranges were from nursery school level through second year high school. The highest percentage of our cases included eight and nine year olds and the third and fourth grades (See Table of Statistics, IV & V, p. 20). Statistical reviews which we have done previously have been approximately the same in this respect. This particular age-group and grade-range may represent what Adler called a "dangerous corner" in life. For it is at about this time, both at home and at school, that more is expected of the child than has been looked for previously. If training in self-reliance and cooperation has been lacking, the child is apt to feel inadequate when pressure is applied and greater demands are made of him. He, therefore, may begin an "advance toward the rear" (Adler) at this point.

Sex of Cases Referred

We were not surprised that our review showed so many more boys than girls were referred. The percentages were:

Boys	76%
Girls	24%

Adler stated, "As a boy grows older, his masculinity becomes a significant duty, his ambition, his desire for power and superiority is indisputably connected with the duty to be masculine. . . . For many children who desire power, it is not sufficient to be simply aware of their masculinity; they must show proof that they are men. . . . What we consider 'masculine' nowadays is common knowledge. Above all, it is something purely egotistical, something which satisfies self-love, gives a feeling of superiority and domination over others, all with the aid of seemingly 'active' characteristics such as courage, strength, duty, the winning of all manner of victories. . . . There is a constant battle for personal superiority because it counts as 'masculine' to be dominant." (2, pp. 127, 128)

Activity Pattern

Adler often commented that the degree of social feeling shows itself in an individual's activity. In his various books, Adler presented many descriptions of "active" and "passive" types. Our review indicates the following:

Active Types	73.5%
Passive Types	26.5%

Adler cautioned that both types of character development may exist to a certain degree in the same individual. The two hundred cases reviewed here were children who had what Adler called the "problem of distance" or had made "psychic detours" whether they were active or passive types. He said, "Any character traits which are conspicuous in a personality must be appropriate to the direction which his psychic development has taken from childhood. This direction may be a straight line or it may be marked by shunts and detours. . . . Obstacles of every sort are dangerous for a straight-line development of character. . . . Where they are present, the paths by which a child will seek to accomplish his goal of power will deviate to a greater or lesser degree from the straight line. . . . He will attempt to attain his goal of recognition and power along psychic detours, not directly, but by craft. His

development is relative to the degree of such deviations." (2, pp. 171, 172)

Sidedness

It was Adler's opinion that many more people than is commonly known are born left-sided and that mostly they are unaware of their leftsidedness, having been trained to use the right hand. He felt that since we live in a right-handed culture, left-sidedness may be felt as if it were an inferiority *in later life*. He said, "In early life, the left-handed child has certain difficulties, for often the peculiarity is not recognized and blame is incurred for clumsiness. Such a child connects its imperfect dexterity with all other difficulties at home and at school, and suffers from a depression which centers its interest too much in itself. Thus, left-handed children often acquire the feeling that the world is a dangerous place and become more liable to neurosis than others." (1, p. 114) In the light of the above, it is interesting to note the findings in this review:

Right-sided Cases	4.5%
Left-sided Cases (writing with left hand)	23.5%
Compensated Left-sided Cases (writing with right hand)	66.5%
Cases in which Sidedness was Undetermined	5.5%

Early Memories

In reference to early memories, Adler said, "Among all psychic expressions, some of the most revealing are the individual's memories. His memories are the reminders he carries about with him of his own limits and of the meaning of circumstances. There are no 'chance memories'; out of the incalculable number of impressions which meet an individual, he chooses to remember only those which he feels, however darkly, to have a bearing on his situation. Thus, his memories represent his 'Story of My Life'; a story he repeats to himself to warn him or comfort him, to keep him concentrated on his goal, to prepare him by means of past experiences to meet the future with an already tested style of action." (3, p. 73)

The early memories of our two hundred cases can be placed in the category of "danger" (or implying danger) memories, or "getting" (or implying getting) memories. They were as follows:

Danger (or Implying Danger) Memories	63.5%
Getting (or Implying Getting) Memories	33.0%
No Memories Available ³	3.5%

A typical danger memory was, "A boy threw a rock and it hit me and I got a hole in the head." A typical getting memory was, "I remember in bed at my grandmother's, I got a policeman's uniform from my aunt." These and all the other early recollections we have gathered in this review reveal the "core of the life-style" of these children. All of these children, with whom we have dealt, have been children who tend to isolate themselves, avoid danger and/or look always for what life has to *give* them.

Ordinal Position in the Family Constellation

Alfred Adler was the first to open up a wide field for research work by delineating the advantages and disadvantages for children according to the order of their birth. He wrote, "It is a common fallacy to imagine that children of the same family are formed in the same environment. Of course, there is much which is the same for all in the same home, but the psychic situation of each child is individual and differs from that of others because of their succession." (1, p. 151) He cautioned repeatedly: (1) that there could be no fixed rules in dealing with human beings; (2) that all characteristics he described as typical of certain positions in the family were liable to modification by other circumstances; (3) but it was a "statistical probability" that there would be many similarities in the patterns of behavior of oldest children, of second children, of youngest, of only, et cetera. These characteristics are to be found in most of Adler's books and do not need to be described here. All Individual Psychologists find it helpful in their work to keep in mind Adler's descriptions of typical characteristics inherent in various ordinal positions.

A breakdown of ordinal positions, *calendar-wise*, of the two hundred cases reviewed may be found in the Statistical Table, X, on page 21. However, Adler frequently pointed out that an age-difference of more than five years between one sibling and the next would appre-

³ Some children refused to give any memories. In such instances, Adler felt that this refusal in itself was revealing and he commented, "We can gather they do not wish to discuss their fundamental meaning and that they are not prepared for cooperation." (3, p. 75)

ciably alter the "statistical probabilities" with regard to the behavior patterns of various ordinal positions as described by him. It was his opinion that wherever such wide age-differences occurred we would probably find *predominantly only children features*. For example, in a family of four children where the age-differences are 23, 21, 16, and 8 years, the youngest child will probably behave like an *only child* with "five parents or supervisors."

In observance of the above, we have compiled a breakdown of family constellations and ordinal positions with reference to age-differences amongst the siblings. Wherever an age-difference between one sibling and another was six years or more we have considered the child as a "psychological" or "pseudo" *only child*. In so doing various ordinal positions appear as follows:

Only (plus Pseudo Only)	39.5%
Oldest	27.0%
Youngest	23.0%
Middle	6.0%
Other Positions (Twins, etc.)	4.5%

The above conversion is interesting in the light of Adler's description of the characteristic manner in which the *only child* is apt to relate to life. He said, "The Only Child becomes dependent to a high degree, waits constantly for someone to show him the way, and searches for support at all times." (2, p. 154) It is significant that in our work we have found an inordinately high percentage of "leaning, dependent types" amongst the children with whom we have worked.

We have been impressed with the *small* percentage of middle children who have been brought to our Center. The explanation may lie in any of several directions. The middle child has the characteristics of a second, and yet, he is not the youngest. He has never experienced being the sole object of attention as the oldest, nor being petted (pampered) as the youngest or baby of the family so frequently is. He has a "pacemaker" in front of him and he feels "the hot breath of the youngest blowing on the back of his neck"! In describing the second child, Adler said, "From the time he is born, he shares attention with another child; and he is therefore a little nearer to cooperation than an oldest child. He has a greater circle of human beings in his environment; and, if the oldest is not fighting against him and pushing him

back, he is very well situated. . . . Throughout his childhood he has a pacemaker. There is always a child ahead of him in age and development and he is stimulated to exert himself and catch up. . . . He behaves as if he were in a race, as if someone were a step or two ahead of him. He is under full steam all the time." (3, p. 148) The fact that he *is* a second and no longer the youngest may account for the fact that in all of our experience, for many years now, we have had few middle children referred to us for help.

Length of Treatment

As stated previously, working with the whole family gestalt and treating family relationships, it is possible for the Individual Psychologist to get effective and rapid results in a relatively short period of time. Our records indicate that, out of two hundred cases, as many as 103 cases (51.5 per cent) required less than ten one-hour interviews at weekly periods; that 57 cases (28.5 per cent) required less than twenty such interviews. This means that 80 per cent of our cases were helped in under four months time, being seen only once a week.

We have on record cases where only one or two or three interviews were sufficient to alter the whole difficulty initially presented to us. These were cases in which the parents were ready for insight, understood the problem at once, were willing to do a "right about face" in relating to their children and functioned as a team to bring about a more cooperative and useful kind of behavior in the child.

Degree of Success

In attempting to estimate "degree of success" with our two hundred cases we have made four categories: (1) SUCCESSFUL—means that there was a complete change in terms of referral data as well as in terms of basic behavior changes; (2) PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL—means that there was a definite change in terms of referral complaints but not necessarily any extensive behavior changes beyond those points (in other words, superficial symptoms, which were the basis of the difficulty and the reason for the case being referred originally, disappeared but the case went no further because the parents were satisfied at this point); (3) INDETERMINATE SUCCESS—means cases where parents were not ready or willing to accept insight, did not follow our recommendations and thus served as a "road block" in our efforts to help the child so that the type of results we are accustomed to getting were not apparent to

us at the time the case was discontinued by us or by the parents; (4) UNKNOWN SUCCESS—means either cases where we were unable to complete our work because the family moved, there was a death, accident, illness—or, cases where parents decided not to return for reasons (in many cases) unknown to us.

The degree of success in the handling of our two hundred cases, percentagewise, as estimated at the time of discontinuance at our Center, is as follows:

Successful	73.5%
Partially Successful	18.0%
Indeterminate Success	3.5%
Unknown Success	5.0%

Discussion

It will be noted that there is no category on the so-called “rejected child.” We were asked recently by a research psychologist whether the most rejected child in a three-child family is the one who was born first, the one in the middle position, or the one who was born last; whether children tend to be rejected when they reach a particular age; whether it is boys or girls who are more rejected by their mothers. Since this concept is so much a part of most psychological theories, we feel obliged to outline our thinking on this point. We did not do a statistical review in this respect for it has been our experience that *every* child who is brought to us is a “rejected-rejecting” child. He is not fitting into (rejecting) the family and social context and is *in opposition to it*. And society (parents, school, et cetera) rejects his mistaken behavior.

It takes two to make a fight. Every stick has two ends. The child is rejecting of the parents and parents of the child when the child is failing. The rejection is *mutual*. It is never enough to speak only of the “rejected child” for he is also a “rejecting child”!

We find very few children who were hated from birth. Most infants are loved at the beginning. It is only when the child begins to develop a will-of-his-own that the process of mutual rejection arises. To think only in terms of the “rejected child” is to think of the child as a Thing-in-Itself. The child must be seen as part of his social context. When he starts working at cross-purpose with those around him generally, the rejection is a mutual process between him and the larger community of the home, the school, et cetera.

Mutual rejection, as we see it, can arise from a number of situations regardless of ordinal position in the family constellation. Each ordinal position presents its dangers and its advantages. Although our statistical findings indicate that *only* children and *pseudo only* children may be more sensitive to disturbance, we feel no real generalization can be made on this unless a very much larger number of cases were to be studied. No single position in itself is inherently damaging. None need lead to rejection. Whether a child chooses to emphasize the negative aspects of his ordinal position depends on a variety of life-situations that are unique to his own family. But, even here, we must remember that Adler said, "What a child *feels* need not actually be the case. It does not matter what really has happened. . . . What is important is *his interpretation* of his situation." (2, p. 150)

It is important to point out that the one single factor that accounts for most of the mutual rejections that come to our attention is *jealous rivalry* between siblings and, in the case of the only child, in relation to those outside the home. Jealous rivalry places the child at cross-purpose to cooperation with others. His goal is to be the "Favored Child" and he expects others to submit to a position of less importance. His wishes are as "laws binding on the community." He rejects those who oppose his dominance. If the parents do not know how to resolve this jealous rivalry when it begins, the fighting that ensues frequently leads the parent into opposition to the child as well as the child into opposition to the parent.

To speak only of the "rejected child" is to obscure the etiology of "mutual rejection." The whole family gestalt should at all times be kept in mind and the unique struggle for dominance that may go on differently in each family.

REFERENCES

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3. Adler, Alfred. *What Life Should Mean to You*, Little Brown & Co., New York (1931).
4. Beecher, Willard. "A New Approach to Remedial Reading," *American Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol. X, Nos. 1 & 2, Chicago (1952-1953).

STATISTICAL TABLE

<i>I. Number of Cases Reviewed</i>		200
<i>II. Types of Problems Referred to Center</i>		
Behavior Problems		36.0%
Remedial Reading Problems		47.5%
Remedial Math Problems		4.0%
Remedial Spelling Problems		1.0%
General Academic Retardation Problems		115.0%
<i>III. Average Number of Interviews Required</i>		135.0%
<i>IV. Age Range</i>		
5 Years		3.0%
6 "		3.5%
7 "		13.5%
8 "		17.0%
9 "		20.0%
10 "		10.5%
11 "		6.5%
12 "		9.0%
13 "		8.5%
14 "		6.0%
15 "		2.0%
17 "		0.5%
<i>V. Grade Level</i>		
Not in School		0.5%
Nursery School		1.0%
Kindergarten		1.0%
CRMD (Children Retarded Mentally Department)		2.0%
Opportunity Class (Ungraded)		2.0%

STATISTICAL TABLE (Continued)

1st Grade	5.5%
2nd "	13.0%
3rd "	17.0%
4th "	17.5%
5th "	11.5%
6th "	8.0%
7th "	6.5%
8th "	8.5%
H.S. 1st Year	4.5%
H.S. 2nd "	1.5%
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<i>VI. Sex of Cases Referred</i>	
Boys	76.0%
Girls	24.0%
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<i>VII. Activity Pattern</i>	
Active Types	73.5%
Passive Types	26.5%
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<i>VIII. Sidedness</i>	
Right-sided Cases	4.5%
Left-sided Cases (writing with left hand)	23.5%
Compensated Left-sided Cases (writing with right hand)	66.5%
Cases in Which Sidedness Was Undetermined	5.5%
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<i>IX. Early Memories</i>	
Danger (or Implying Danger) Memories	63.5%
Getting (or Implying Getting) Memories	33.0%
No Memories Available	3.5%
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<i>X. Ordinal Position in Family Constellation—Calendar-wise</i>	
Only	15.0%
Oldest	35.0%
Youngest	35.0%
Middle	8.0%
Other Positions (Twins, etc.)	7.0%

STATISTICAL TABLE (Continued)

X. Ordinal Position in Family Constellation—Behavior-wise

Only	39.5%
Oldest	27.0%
Youngest	23.0%
Middle	6.0%
Other Positions (Twins, etc.)	4.5%

XII. Length of Treatment in Terms of One-hour Interviews

Less than 10 One-Hour Interviews	51.5%
" " 20 " "	28.5%
" " 30 " "	9.0%
" " 40 " "	7.5%
" " 50 " "	0.5%
" " 60 " "	1.5%
" " 70 " "	1.0%
147 " "	0.5%

XIII. Degree of Success (See explanation in context)

Successful	73.5%
Partially Successful	18.0%
Indeterminate Success	3.5%
Unknown Success	5.0%