

# Eight Avenues of Life Style Consistency

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Three very important developments of modern psychological science have been the lawful and orderly arrangement of factual data, the phenomenon of subjective perception, and the notion of growth motivation in human striving. There are three parallels in Adler's Individual Psychology. There is a unity and consistency in personality which follows the dictum of the lawful and orderly nature of science. The same pattern is found in all regions of the psyche. Adler's contribution here is the concept of life style. Secondly, there is the phenomenon of subjective perception, each of us viewing the world from a particular frame of reference. Psychology tells us how interests, motivations, values, norms and the goals for which we strive affect and influence our perceptual selection and interpretation. Adler's parallel concept is that of private logic which is peculiar to each unique personality. With regard to growth motivation in human striving, there are different conceptions such as "self-actualization" and "competence." Adler's concept is the great upward drive of overcoming felt weakness and going from a minus to a plus position (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956).

Two important bases of Adler's Individual Psychology are goal directed striving for mastery and significance as well as consistency in personality. Each person in his own way and through his subjective perception or private logic is striving for his place and sense of significance. In striving for this self created goal, there is essential consistency in all spheres of the psyche and in all dimensions of personality. This includes the conscious and the unconscious, the sexual and non-sexual areas, as well as thinking (cognitive), feeling (affective), and doing (action) processes. The same consistency is found in all regions of the mind and personality. All parts of the person are basically striving for the same goal of significance according to one's life plan and logic.

A prior approach for understanding human behavior was to look to the past for etiological and causal factors. Another increasingly appreciated approach is based upon teleoanalytic theory, that is, understanding the purposefulness of behavior. To understand a person one must think of his behavior in terms of goal directedness.

Life style is the way the individual sees himself and views life. It gives a distinctiveness to one's strivings and approaches to the problems of life. A person very early in life begins to say I am like this, the world is like that, and this is what I must do to find my place. The mind is a unity and the same style of life runs through all of its expressions. To further clarify I shall explain the

rubber stamp analogy. Each person is like a rubber stamp. The essence of personality is reflected in all that he does. If the rubber stamp has the imprint "John Doe" and is pressed on a surface, we see a reflection of the name John Doe. Some of the variables that determine the clearness and legibility of the imprint include the following: amount of ink on the rubber stamp, pressure on the stamp when making the imprint, texture and color of the surface upon which the imprint is made. For instance, a black imprint on a black rough surface will hardly be seen. A heavily inked stamp gives a different impression than a relatively dry one. But no matter where you press the rubber stamp—on a sheet of white paper, on the wall, the blackboard, your arm—there is always a reflection of a part of the imprint John Doe. Each person is like a rubber stamp in that no matter what he does, his life style is reflected in his behavior, feelings, and thoughts. The life style is reflected in much, if not all, of what the person is and does.

### **Eight Avenues of Life Style Consistency**

Eight different avenues or ways to know and learn about the life style are now listed and briefly highlighted. They are as follows:

1. Case history data - knowing about subject.
2. Psychological interviewing - talking to subject.
3. Expressive behavior - observing subject.
4. Psychological testing - measuring subject.
5. Family constellation - social influence on subject.
6. Early recollections - subject's meaning of life.
7. Grouping - interacting with subject.
8. Symptomatic behavior - subject's telltale signs.

The consistent and patterned life style is found in each of the eight categories. All spheres of the psyche and personality reflect this consistency. All partial functions are entities of the same organized, unified whole person. The eight different avenues can be utilized to help find the uniqueness and consistency of life style. The best procedure is to elicit data from all of the avenues.

With **case history information** we simply find out about the person whose life style we are trying to diagnose and understand. There is no need for observing or talking to the subject. Case notes from parents, a social worker, teacher, peers, and the like can often facilitate making significant inferences about life style organization and consistency. An excellent demonstration by Adler (1931) of understanding a life style from reading a case history prepared by a physician is presented in the case of Mrs. A. The case was presented to him before a professional group for his extemporaneous consideration and impromptu interpretation. The coherence of life style that Adler finds is quite apparent.

In **psychological interviewing** we talk to the client. The special significance of interviewing, however, is in trying to find consistency in personality. Numerous questions are available to help tap this consistency. With any given question it is important to ask why the response is given. It is well known in psychology that two people may do the same thing for different reasons. In response to the question, "Who is the most famous person who ever lived?" person number one says Christ because he founded Christianity and preached love. Person number two says Christ because he was known by so many. A third person says Christ because he could walk on the water and do other miracles.

**Expressive behavior** is the third way to help find and understand life style. The intention here is to see, hear, and observe the client. Posture, dress, nonverbal communicative signs can be organized into a meaningful and coherent whole. They are all going to the same goal-directed striving for mastery and security. For example, Lombardi (1969) shows how the picture that emerges from an analysis of the drug addict's special language is quite compatible with the professional consensus of him as a deviant person.

The next avenue is **psychological testing** considered from an idiographic point of view. The response set of an individual often yields more insight than the normative scores and data themselves. The intention with intelligence testing is to elicit one's best or highest performance. With personality testing the idea is to observe the testee's typical or usual performance, not his best performance. As many psychometricians know, personality is reflected in intelligence testing and the converse is also true. A good testing procedure is to become aware of patterns and styles rather than attending to separate traits and characteristics. A partial function alone cannot be examined because it takes on a different meaning in the total context. Angers (1963) presents guidelines for Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) interpretation that can easily be adapted for life style consistency inquiry.

Of all the means to understand life style, a study of the **family constellation dynamics** is not only the starting point but also the single most important avenue. One's ordinal position in the family leaves an indelible imprint upon one's personality and life style. Rudolf Dreikurs (1968, 1971) has taken the lead in showing, teaching, and demonstrating how the family constellation reveals the life style of an individual. In the family constellation, each sibling develops unique character traits, thus adapting to peculiar circumstances which disclose his style of life (Adler, 1931).

**Early recollections** or first memories should be obtained and interpreted after the dynamics of the family constellation are understood. In order to obtain these memories the subject is asked to relate the first specific incidents in his life that he remembers. First memories show the life style in its origin and in its simplest form. They represent the person's estimation of his life situation—I am like this, the world is like that, this is what I expect from others and what I must

do to find my place. The family constellation is the starting point for understanding life style; however, early recollections help bring it into clearer focus. Adler (1931) shows how both early memories and dreams help uncover life style.

The next avenue of insight into one's personality is **grouping** or interacting with the subject. In a group encounter the opportunity is afforded to witness one's life style. The concern with behavior in the group is not with the past and causal factors; rather, emphasis is based upon the here and now and the purposive and goal directed nature of behavior. Malamud (1959) suggests how a person's understanding of himself and of the formative influences in his life can be explored in a group setting. Many situations and techniques in a group lend themselves to conscious exploration and show how differing reactions reflect varying orientations in life.

The last avenue for understanding life style is an understanding of **symptomatic behavior.** Symptoms are especially conspicuous in the care of persons with psychopathology. In such cases the symptoms help provide dramatic insights. Symptoms are also looked at from the teleological point of view. In other words, what is the purpose of the symptom and what does it accomplish? Symptoms like all of the preceding avenues are always in accord with life style. Shulman and Mosak (1967) stress the purposive nature of the symptom in accordance with the point of view that behavior is goal-directed, and that the functional mental illnesses represent inadequate or socially useless ways of dealing with the demands of life.

### **Case Study Clarification of Life Style Consistency and Identification**

At this point let me briefly present a clinical case to demonstrate life style consistency and its identification. Sue is the youngest of three children. There are two older brothers. An older sister has died at the age of four. All of the children were petrified of the father, but Sue showed it least. The mother was perceived as clean and neat and the father as a nag. As a child Sue was active, rebellious, and somewhat tomboyish. And at other times she was the good child who did things for others. Of all the siblings she felt she was the least intelligent and had the most friends. Her earliest recollections indicate she never did anything right. She recalls her mother telling her, "You are cute but not beautiful like your sister who died," and her father saying, "If your sister had not died you would not be here." In expressive behavior, Sue is a life-of-the-party character, liking people to think of her as witty and the center of attraction. She is looking for love and respect in an extraordinary way. In sex behavior fellatio is desired above all other sexual expressions. Only after this will she move toward heterosexual intercourse and perhaps cunnilingus. In sexual intercourse, climax is reached when she is in the upper active position. It is interesting that her choice of a most famous person is Leonardo da Vinci and

Michelangelo because of what they could do and produce not for themselves but for others. As both a child and an adult Sue was quite fearful and could become attended to and recognized by being active, rebellious, sociable and going above and beyond the call of duty. The refrain of "she's amazing" and "look what she can do" is found throughout her personality and life style. Sue's situation improved when she began to understand and appreciate the purpose of her maladaptive behavior. "Look and see what she could do" was no longer the yardstick to measure her worth as a person. She understood why she behaved as she did in the past. Now, with increased courage, self confidence and social competence, and with lots of encouragement from the therapist she began to act independent of her past conditioning.

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