

The Victim

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Adler set some limits to the efforts of Adlerians to establish a typology since he felt that typing would tend to violate the idiographic approach of Individual Psychology. He did, however, discuss a "ruling" type, a "getting" type, an "avoiding" type, and a "socially useful" type.¹ Although Adlerians believe that each individual is unique and each life-style idiosyncratic, clinical observation permits us to see similarities in life-styles. Therefore, we have developed a classification of personality "types" based on life-style analysis; i.e., similarities in goals and movements toward these goals. One of these types is the "victim."

Objective Observations

The objective observer of the victim would note some of the following characteristic behaviors. Victims have the knack of handling problems in such a way that they always come out on the short end of the stick. They will (unconsciously) do or say things that will provoke others to attack them or victimize them in some way. A typical victim is the girl who always falls in love with what the observer can see is the wrong man (he's married, he's an alcoholic, etc.). She will come out of every affair complaining how poorly she has been treated, or how unlucky she was, and never stop to consider that she chose the man to begin with. One can see her setting up her own downfall. The self-fulfilling prophecy takes over and she moves in the direction of her expectations.

Very often victims have a sweet, likable quality about them that appears as a form of naivete. They do not seem to learn from their mistakes and will enter into one situation after another where they get "screwed." (After all, if one is going to play victim it helps to be naive, absent-minded, forgetful, trusting, careless, and dumb.)

One patient reported meeting a girl in a bar, marrying her after one week, and accepting her explanation of illness. One month later she spent a long time in the washroom and came out with a baby. He claimed complete innocence that she had been pregnant and couldn't understand how he had gotten into that situation.

1. Adler, Alfred, *Superiority and Social Interest*, Ansbacher, Heinz J. and Ansbacher, Rowena R., Eds. Northwestern University Press, 1970. Chap. 6., pp. 68-70.

For a more complete description of the "getter" see:

Mosak, Harold H., The getting type, a parsimonious social interpretation of the oral character, *Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol. 15, 193-198. Nov. 1959.

Some victims act angry and bitter and complain about how mistreated they are by others. The following is an example of this type of victim's early recollection.

When I was 7 years old I brought a pickle to school and hid it in my desk. The boy next to me told the teacher about it and the teacher bawled me out. I was very angry at the boy for snitching on me and at the teacher for yelling at me.

It just never occurred to this woman that she was at fault for bringing the pickle to school in the first place.

Subjective Feelings

The subjective emotion most often experienced by the victim is suffering. They blame people, including themselves, for their misfortunes and feel, "Look what you or they have done to me!" Whether he blames himself (one type of victim) or other people (another type of victim) the victim always feels abused, put-upon, or unlucky. Many times they feel depressed, and often express feelings of helplessness.

In general they follow the rubric, "I am always suffering either from myself or other people and I can't do anything to prevent it."

Early Training

The family constellation of a victim would suggest early training in convincing oneself that one is helpless and other people are stronger, more powerful, or able to arrange things to come out as they intend. Also, there would have to be some kind of pay-off in being a victim like convincing one's parents that one is too awkward and so they have to do things for him, or the bullies always pick on him so he doesn't have to go to the store. Expert victims even get an ice cream cone for being hurt.

Perhaps the youngest child who often feels as if he were a midget in a world of giants could learn to believe he was a helpless victim; or, the oldest child who has to learn to do everything first in the family could exaggerate the unpredictability of life and feel like the victim of life's forces. But, ordinal position is not usually related to being a victim.

Self-Image

An examination of early recollections may reveal any of the following self-images:

I am _____		
Helpless	Inadequate	A good guy who tries
Powerless	In danger	hard and is very
Innocent		conscientious

I _____
Try hard but it never works
Always get the short end of the stick

Image of Others

Early recollections may show the following attitudes about other people:

Other people are _____
Likely to screw me
Likely to exploit me
Likely to cause difficulties for me
Supposed to take care of me

World View

Attitudes about the world, life, or the social environment can be:

The world is _____
Inimical to me
Full of bad luck
Full of unexpected catastrophies
Sometimes confusing
Usually dangerous

When I plan a picnic, it always rains.

Modus Operandi

The most characteristic way the victim relates to others is through his unconscious arrangement to provoke others into attacking him. His strategy dictates getting "one-up" through being "one-down" and having an audience who will notice the blood.

The most common defense mechanism (one form of the MO) of the victim is denial. He does not admit to himself how much he enjoys that which he brought about. The girl who is so sexually seductive with her dates that they almost literally rape her when they get back from dinner will admit with a sheepish grin that she usually enjoys intercourse with the men who "attack" her. However, she will emphasize the "rape" rather than the enjoyment, thereby preserving her good intentions.

The Unconscious Goal

Adler tells us that all behavior (objectively observed and/or subjectively experienced) is movement toward an unconscious final fictive goal of superiority. What is the victim's unconscious goal? Although it may vary from

person to person, the goal is usually to win pity and love, thus to manipulate others so that they will give him special consideration (since he's such a precious little flower so easily bruised by life) and take care of him. The victim's life-style is one which ultimately arranges to put others into his service because he's such a pitiful object.

Sometimes the victim manipulates others to do nasty things to him so that he may stand in accusation against them and thereby gain his fictive goal of superiority.

Conclusion

To be a victim is to use a certain method of operation in one's movement through life. Even though the victim's self-image may be "I am a victim," it is his *Modus Operandi* which is the main consideration. Victims differ from injustice collectors and those who see life as unfair. They may be martyrs or even weak "babies," but it is only the true victim who goes out looking for spiderwebs so he can get caught.