

A COMPARISON OF ALLPORT'S AND THE ADLERIAN CONCEPTS
OF LIFE STYLE: Contributions to a Psychology of the Self

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I. Allport's Position

Gordon Allport and Alfred Adler have been previously compared by Ansbacher (1) and by Long (2) and found to be similar in their holistic approach to understanding man. Both Allport and Adler were found to consider man as purposive, future oriented, goal striving, and self-directing.

In a more recent work (3) Allport asked the question: Is the concept of Self necessary in psychology? He discusses the controversy between "psychology with a soul" and "psychology without a soul" and points out that in recent years the notion of self has been expressed in American psychology in terms such as "self-image," "self-actualization," "ego-involvement," etc. Allport points out that this new tendency to return to the ego is the result of the failure of positivistic analysis to satisfactorily explain personality. However, he warns, "the tendency to employ 'self' or 'ego' as a factum to repair the ravages of positivism may do more harm than good." (p. 38) Allport then goes on to say a possible clue to the solution, so far as psychology is concerned, lies in a statement made by Alfred Adler, "What is frequently labeled 'the ego' is nothing more than the style of the individual." (4) Life-style to Adler had a deep and important meaning. He is saying that if psychology could give us a full and complete account of Life-style it would automatically include all phenomena now referred somewhat vaguely to a self or an ego... would discover all of the activities and all of the interrelations in life, which are now either neglected or consigned to an ego that looks suspiciously like a homunculus." (p. 39) Allport distinguishes between what is important to a person and what is merely a matter of fact to him (what is central and what is peripheral to his being). He adds, "All the regions of life that we regard as peculiarly ours... I suggest we call the proprium." He then composes proprium (pp. 41-53) of bodily sense, self-identity, ego-enhancement, ego-extension, rational agent, self-image (including present self-image and idealized self-image) appropriate strivings, and the knower.

Allport concludes, "Once again we refer to Adler's contention that an adequate psychology of the life-style would... dispense with the need for a separate psychology of the ego. I believe Adler's position, though unelaborated, is essentially the same as the one here advocated." (p. 55)

In view of these comments, it seems appropriate to re-examine Adler's theory of the Life Style. This discussion will do so from three points of view: What Adler's theory was, how other individual psychologists have extended Adler's theories and the relationship

between the Life Style and Allport's proprium. The paper will conclude with some implications for psychotherapy.

II. Adler's Theory of the Life Style

The most orderly presentation of Adler's views is to be found in the Ansbachers' excellent collation of his writings. (5) Their views follow here:

In 1907 (p. 30) Adler, while still a member of Freud's group, used the term "confluence of drives" and "transformation of drives." The latter term represented an idea which became important in Freudian psychology, but "in Adler merely foreshadowed his view that all causal factors, including drives, are relative to the individual's style of life." (p. 31) The confluence of several drives then provided a "main axis" for personality development. This concept was ultimately developed by Adler into the concept of "style of life." The Ansbachers point out (p. 95) that Adler introduced the term "guiding self-ideal" in 1912. This self-ideal (which Ansbacher carefully distinguishes from Freud's "ego-ideal") was the "fictional final goal" of the individual, the *causa finalis* of the mental life and its governing principles. (p. 95) "The fictional abstract ideal is the point of origin for the formation and differentiation of the given psychological resources into preparatory attitudes, readiness and character traits. The individual then wears the character traits demanded, by the fictional goal, just as the character mask (persona) of the ancient actor had to fit the finale of the tragedy." (p. 94)

It was not until the 1930's that Adler developed the concept of Life Style in the sense that Allport uses. At this time (1933) Adler finally settled on the term "The Unique Law of Movement" which underlies the "Style of Life." (p. 174) The Ansbachers describe the various terms Adler used as equivalents of Life Style (self, individuality, method of facing problems, opinion about oneself and the problems of life, whole attitude toward life, self-consistent unity, etc.); and select from Adler's writings passages which describe Life Style as having the following characteristics:

1. It originates in the creative power of the individual who is trying to develop a rule of thumb for facing life.
2. It is self-consistent. It is coherent and unified and always follows the private logic of the individual.*
3. It is constant. It does not change from time to time or situation to situation. What remains flexible is the ability to find new and better ways of striving toward the goal inherent in the existing life style.
4. It is formed in early childhood. Both Adler and Freud considered childhood years very important--Freud, because certain events mold the child; Adler, because the child is forming at this

* "Private logic" is a term used to denote the personal convictions and value systems of an individual by which he judges how to think, feel and act about events. Private logic may, but seldom does, follow the rules of formal logic, or of "common logic;" i.e. common sense. If one understands the private logic of a person, one understands his motivations and may predict much of his behavior.

time, his subjective opinions about life, his apperceptive tendencies and is creating his "guiding point" (self ideal). (5, p. 95) Once formed, the life style becomes increasingly harder to change, since it is constantly reinforced by the individual's selective apperception of life experiences.

5. It is sovereign. By means of selective perception, cognition, memory, etc., it presses the individual into a characteristic mode of living, a characteristic attitudinal position. It is a self-created construct which begins as a rule of thumb but is then elevated to the status of a law (the "unique law of movement").

6. It becomes the intervening variable between cause and effect, between the stimulation from the outside world and the responsive behavior of the individual ("soft determinism").

III. Later Additions

The concept of Life Style was examined by Dreikurs (6) who distinguished between a "life-style" and "life-plan." The "plan" consists of the basic concepts of the individual which set his attitudes and provide his frames of reference. The "style" is his characteristic direction of movement. According to this formulation the "fictional final goal" would be part of the life plan and both plan and style would be included in the term "unique law of movement."

For Mosak (7) the life style is a set of convictions which he separates into four component parts or aspects for teaching purposes and indicates that one can break it down into a greater or lesser number of components if one wishes.* These aspects are:

1. A self-concept

2. A self-ideal, which is like Horney's idealized self. (9) It includes all the individual wants to be and thinks he "should" be: his hopes, aspirations and goals. This seems to be Adler's "guiding self-ideal" (5, p. 95)

3. An environmental evaluation; convictions about life, people and the physical universe

4. Ethical convictions (which may not coincide with those of society); ideas of right and wrong, good and bad, etc., for proprieate behavior only.

Aspects #2 and #4 share the "shoulds." Mosak separates them because #4 implies the existence of a moral sense, while #2 need not and he finds this a more convenient way of establishing a basis for teaching that the feeling of guilt is a variety of inferiority feeling. Inferiority feelings are seen as consequences of a discrepancy between convictions. The larger the gap between the self-concept and self-ideal, for example, the greater the feeling of inferiority (similar to Horney's description of the gap between self-concept and idealized image). (9) The inferiority feeling leads to compensatory conclusions and goals which may be further included in the self-ideal or which can be considered a fifth aspect of life style; namely, the "fictional final goal."

Mosak(10) specifically excludes from the life style non-proprieate

* The terms self-concept, environmental evaluation and ethical attitudes used by Mosak, are taken from Coleman. (8)

activities and convictions. This type of distinction is the same that Allport makes between matters of importance to the individual and matters of fact, between what is vital and central and what is peripheral. In this respect, the whole question of life-style must be considered in the framework of a psychology of values as has been done by Mosak and Shulman. (10)

Shulman (10) describes the life style as developing according to rubric: "I am thus, the world is so, life demands such and such, therefore..." The self-concept plus environmental evaluation lead thus to the formation of a plan which includes a goal or end-point (wherein it is perceived that adaptation will be successful) and a choice of action (which is perceived as leading toward the desired goal). Also, the self-chosen fictive goal will guide the individual toward those private ethics which will most help him to reach his private goal.

The attitudes in the life style can also be categorized according to the type of conviction (what the conviction is concerned with). Thus, the life style is a set of convictions dealing with Zarathustra's eternally recurring questions, "Why, wherefore, whither and how." The individual seeks answers to the questions: What am I?, What are my chances?, What is life?, What is important?, What must I do?, What does it all mean?, etc.

The life style can be understood as both the way in which the individual poses these questions (e.g. what he chooses to focus on) and how he answers them in his living.

Sicher and Dreikurs, however, reserve the term "life style" for the characteristic movement (i.e., one has the life style of a "beggar," a "prince," a "tyrant," etc.) for the leitmotif of the individual's behavior. Dreikurs points out that individuals with similar self-concepts, ethical values and ideas about life may still have different life styles; by which he means different characteristic modi vivendi.^{*} Mosak and Shulman obviously use the term "life style" in a broader sense, including in it approximately all those aspects of personality that Allport would call proprie and all the various definitions used by Adler in discussing "life style."

Ferguson points out that Adler's theory of the Life Style requires at least four basic propositions. She lists these as:

1. The objective environment to which man adapts and with which he interacts is primarily a social environment.
2. The individual is a unit, an irreducible whole.
3. An individual develops a dominant motivation. The directive aspect of motivation is a goal. The dominant direction of the individual is toward this goal.
4. Within the limits of the objective environment, these "inner directive processes" serve as a "subjective environment" which provides direction and stimuli for behavior.

The concept of a "unified personality" together with that of "inner directedness" indicates the "main theme" and dominant motivating "goals" of the personality are based upon subjectivity perceived values.

* Personal communication to the author.

Adler saw all life as "movement," all "movement" as directed toward a goal which is evolved from the subjective environment. The basic motivation was the striving nature of life; life was growth, a movement from minus to plus. In humans this striving takes social form. If the striver has a sense of gemeinschaftsgefühl (feeling of communality, social interest) his chosen goals will be pro-social. To the extent that his feeling of communality is stunted, the individual develops feelings of personal inferiority. The Law of Compensation (5, p. 97) leads the individual to choose fictive compensatory goals (guiding self-ideals) which would, according to the individual's subjective frame of reference, seem to effectively compensate for the inferiority. For each individual, the "goal" was his chosen way of fulfilling the basic motivation, his form of "upward striving." (11) Consequently, the main or dominant "goal" of the movement (or behavior) has several characteristics:

1. It is a fiction. It is created out of a subjective frame of reference and is a useful construct which enables the individual to direct his life according to his subjective values.*

2. It is private and individual rather than consensual and commonly held. (The question of cultural influences on private goals has not yet been clarified enough for us to include it in this discussion.) It is unconscious and not subject to consensual validation. Therefore, it does not follow common-sense, but the private logic of the individual.

3. It is causative in a finalistic sense. It exerts the directional pull of "telos" on behavior and values. This type of causation can be considered "internal causation."

4. It is a director or direction-setter. Movement in life has many possible directions. The goal limits the possibilities by excluding some and enhancing others. Therefore, the goal operates in one sense by limiting possibilities. "The goal of the mental life becomes its governing principle, its causa finalis. Here we have the root of the unity of the personality, the individuality. It does not matter what the source of its energies may have been. Not their origin but their end, their ultimate goal, constitutes their individual character." (5, p. 94)

5. It is social in nature. The unique Law of Movement is developed to facilitate social adaptation, even though it may paradoxically interfere with this adaptation by reason of mistaken subjective percepts. Consequently, the goal can always be seen as a social goal.

6. It is necessary. Unless behavior followed some blueprint it would all be random behavior. The higher complexity of the human nervous system requires a cognitive blueprint, a plan, for meeting the subjective demands of life; the instinctual blueprint, which sufficed for lower animals, is no longer enough. It is also subjectively experienced as necessary and thus has an urgent and imperative quality.

7. It is adaptive. The final goal of adaptation underlies all the basic psychic strivings.

* cf. Vaihinger's Philosophy of As If which influenced Adler's conceptualizations.

IV. Comparison with Allport's Proprium

A. Bodily sense. This first aspect of the proprium is all Allport, an "anchor" for self-awareness. This term seems to have the connotation of physiological reference points which become part of an individual's body image. The bodily sense fits into Adlerian theory with ease. It is the individual's sense of "What is me," and thus a part of his self-concept.

B. Self-identity. This is not the equivalent of the term self-concept as used by Mosak and Shulman. (10) It is the "Who am I" (self-image). (See F below.)

C. Ego-enhancement. Allport describes this as the "unabashed self-seeking" trait of the personality. This idea resembles Adler's description of the upward striving of the human being. This idea has also been discussed by Van Dusen, (12) who finds in Adler the idea that the individual's personal goal is enhancement through "Standing Forth;" what Adler called "striving for significance." The "Law of Compensation" in Adler's theories would also be an example of this. For Individual Psychologists, healthy ego-enhancement is achieved through Gemeinschaftsgefühl, through constructive identification with the group (feeling of belonging).

D. Ego-extension refers to people, objects or ideals that are important to us. Such extensions in Adlerian psychology would be developed because they lessen personal feelings of inferiority; that is, they have an ego-enhancing quality. They are measured by the individual in terms of "What enhances me?" "What is mine?" "What is on my side?"

E. Rational Agent refers to the problem-solving function of the life-style. It is concerned with finding solutions with methods of operation. Without this function, man could not develop a system of personal private logic which would enable him to bring a cognitive order into his world.

F. Self-image. The Adlerian self-concept would include bodily sense, self-identity and part of the self-image. Allport divides the self-image into 1) the way the patient regards his present abilities, status, etc. (What I am) and 2) his aspirations for himself (What I should be). It is the first part that would be included in the Adlerian self-concept while the aspirations would be included in the self-ideal. Allport says "the ideal self-image is the imaginative aspect of the proprium, and whether accurate or distorted, attainable or unattainable, it plots a course by which such appropriate movement is guided." (p. 47) Thus, aspirations are direction-setters of behavior.

G. Propriate striving. Allport points out that a psychology of motivation based on impulses and drives and tension reduction seems adequate to psychologists accustomed to working with animals. He then adds that as soon as personality enters the stage of ego-extensions and develops a self-image, we are forced to postulate propriate strivings as motives (cf. Ferguson's basic proposition #4); Adlerians would say that since personality is social, its motives are propriate strivings. In this sense, propriate movement strives toward the fictional final goal and makes for unification of the personality. This is exactly the way that Adlerians consider that unity of the personality comes about: through the final

goal which provides the unique law of movement. "...for Adler the self-ideal or fictional goal was the unifying principle of personality..." (5, p. 95)

H. The knower: the "cogniter;" that aspect of the self which "transcends all the other functions of the proprium and holds them in view." (p. 51) For Adlerians this aspect of the self is the "decision maker" and the "believer." Dreikurs indicates that when each individual chooses a course of action he basically acts not according to logic but according to psycho-logic, that is, according to his own biased apperception of the world around him, and his place in it. (6) The knower is therefore always biased with regard to his own final goal and his convictions about himself. It is also the knower with the help of the rational agent who in psychotherapy can recognize his own bias (understand his own life style). The act of recognition implies a change in the knower and leads to further changes in the subjective convictions which constitute the proprium.

V. Implications for Psychotherapy

The more inappropriate and dereistic the chosen life goal, the more life becomes difficult and unpleasant, because the individual is not free to abandon the goal. The more narrow the life style, the smaller the probability of successful adaptive functioning within its limits, the more limited the modi operandi, the fewer the available modes of action, the more frequent the times of difficulty, the greater the possibility of decompensation (psychological bankruptcy).

The concept of life style as a governing system offers a new way of looking at the transaction called psychotherapy. The therapist, in his encounter with the patient, becomes an intruder, someone who tries to insert a foreign body into the cognitive-perceptual system of the patient. Psychotherapy, from this point of view, takes on the aspect of a potential struggle between the consensual logic of the therapist and the private logic of the patient, the latter being forced to defend himself because this scheme and this mode of being are all he knows or has experience of.

Such a concept also permits an ontological definition of the term freedom. The individual develops the life style because he needs a blueprint for living and adapting; having adopted one particular pattern, he is now limited by it. "...the free creative power of the individual in his earliest childhood, and his restricted power in later life, when the child has already adopted a fixed law of movement for his life..." (12, p. 12) Life style thus permits certain behavior but prohibits others. It is a limiter because it is a governor. Freedom now becomes the freedom to change, to transcend the governor, to modify or discard the old pattern and find new ones, to make new choices and test new possibilities, to change the accustomed frame and find new reference points. This kind of freedom becomes a desired goal in psychotherapy.

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