

THE EARLY RECOLLECTIONS OF ADLER, FREUD, AND JUNG

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Early recollections (ERs) have a long tradition of interest and value for the clinical psychologist. Freud, in 1899, described his views on the subject in his paper on "Screen Memories" (11). While Adler began to develop his views together with his general goal-oriented theory, around 1907 to 1913, he did not present them specifically until some twenty years later as chapters in several of his more popular books (2, 3, 4). Though both, Freud and Adler, observed that patients' ERs tended to be innocuous in content, their explanations of this fact reflected basic differences in their theories. Freud believed that the banality of the memories demonstrated their "screening" function, distorting presumed original traumatic experiences which are so threatening to the adult ego that they cannot be admitted into the consciousness. Adler, in contrast, felt that the apparent unimportance of remembered childhood events reflected the role of memory in the overall life style—namely, that an individual selectively remembers only what is consistent with his present view of himself, the world, and other people (5, 15). Thus, ERs can be used as a tool for assessing the current subjective reality within which each person operates. Following Mosak (16), we have distinguished between a recollection and a report in choosing the memories reported in this paper. In order to qualify as a recollection, the memory had to be visualized by the informant, and it had to be an incident that could be described as a single occurrence.

In this paper, we apply the Adlerian methodology to the ERs of Adler, Freud, and Jung. Our purpose is to illustrate this approach with three well-known subjects, and to see how well their recollections reflect their personalities and their theories. Our analysis will therefore concentrate on what seem to us to be the most salient features and trends in the memories. In an effort to achieve balanced presentation, we have omitted memories which repeated themes found in those included in our analysis.

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Freud's recollections were found in Ernest Jones' biography of Freud (13), and Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (9). The sources of Adler's memories are the biography by Phyllis Bottome (7) and Adler's *Practice and Theory* (1). Jung's recollections are from his *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* (15). We should point out that while Jung and Adler give their own ERs, most of Freud's are related by Jones and may therefore not accurately convey the ERs as Freud would have reported them.

In the following we are representing the recollections of our three subjects, each recollection set off in smaller type and followed by our interpretation in regular type.

ADLER'S MEMORIES

ER 1. Age 2. I remember sitting on a bench bandaged up on account of rickets, with my healthy elder brother sitting opposite me. He could run, jump, and move about quite effortlessly, while for me, movement of any sort was a strain and an effort. Everyone went to great pains to help me and my mother and father did all that was in their power to do (7, pp. 30-31).

This recollection expresses Adler's attitude that he is deficient. He compares himself to others and finds himself wanting. The movement and actions of a person are important. There is a payoff for organ inferiority: Others become involved; others are showing social interest.

ER 2. Age 3. My parents left us two boys for a few days in the care of a governess. When they came back I met them, singing a street-song, the words of which are in my mind today, as is the melody to which I sang it. The song was about a woman who explained that she couldn't eat chicken because she was so hurt by the killing of her little hen. At this, the singer asks how she can have such a soft heart, when she thinks nothing of throwing a flowerpot at her husband's head (7, p. 32).

Actions speak louder than words; you can profess good intentions but you will be judged by your actions. We are reminded that Adler quoted Martin Luther's aphorism, "not to watch a person's mouth but his fists" (5, p. 18). There is also concern for good human relations. There is an interest in music.

ER 3. Age 4 or 5. I had pneumonia. The doctor, who had suddenly been called in, told my father that there was no point in going to the trouble of looking after me as there was no hope of my living. At once a frightful terror came over me and a few days later when I was well I decided definitely to become a doctor so that I should have a better defense against the danger of death and weapons to combat it superior to my doctor's (7, pp. 32-33).

Adler is incapacitated and this brings the concern of others. There is fear of dying. It terrifies him when people lose hope or are pessimistic. Adler resolves to compensate by learning appropriate skills. As he later stated: "The recollection of sickness or death is occasionally linked . . . with the attempt to become better equipped to meet them, possibly as a doctor or a nurse" (1, p. 354).

ER 4. Age 5 to 7. The father of one of my playmates, a lampmaker, asked me what I was going to be in life. "A doctor," I said. He answered, "Then you should be strung up at once to the nearest lamp-post." This remark made no adverse impression upon my choice of a profession: I merely thought, "There's another who's had a bad time at the hands of a doctor. But *I* shall be a *real* doctor" (7, p. 33).

People's criticisms of him make no impact—in fact, they strengthen his resolve. A *real* doctor does not give his patients a hard time. He shows an interest in outcome, in the future.

ER 5. Age 5. Adler found that he could not quite believe in the Angel of the Passover visiting each Jewish home and being able to distinguish which was the leavened, and which the unleavened bread prepared for him. Adler therefore, one Passover night after the rest of the family had gone to bed, crept downstairs in his nightshirt and substituted leavened for unleavened bread, sitting up for the rest of the night in a cupboard with the door ajar, to discover through the crack the effect upon the Angel. "Nor was I altogether surprised," he told the writer, "when the Angel did not turn up" (7, pp. 33-34).

Adler is skeptical of the beliefs of others, especially in regard to religion, and he will experiment and observe, in an effort to find the truth. It is interesting to note that Adler joined the Protestant Church in 1904, a small minority group in Austria at that time, which was considered most liberal (6, p. 331; 8, pp. 583-584).

ER 6. Age 5. I remember that the path to the school led over a cemetery. I was frightened every time and was exceedingly put out at beholding the other children pass the cemetery without paying the least attention to it, while every step I took was accompanied by a feeling of fear and horror. Apart from the extreme discomfort occasioned by this fear, I was also annoyed at the idea of being less courageous than the others. One day I made up my mind to put an end to this fear of death. Again, I decided on a treatment of hardening. I stayed at some distance behind the others, placed my school-bag on the ground near the wall of the cemetery and ran across it a dozen times, until I felt that I had mastered the fear. After that, I believe, I passed along this path without any fear (1, pp. 179-180).

Adler is afraid of death. He can overcome fear by taking action. Again—he compares himself to others and comes out on the short end. Fear inhibits one's movement.

It should be noted that the cemetery recollection turned out to be a fiction. Adler wrote: "Thirty years after that I met an old schoolmate and we exchanged childhood reminiscences. . . . He insisted there never had been a cemetery on the way to our school. Then I realized that the story . . . had been but a poetic dress for my longing to overcome the fear of death" (1, p. 180).

Summary. Adler's memories express the attitude: I am inferior (ERS 1, 3). I don't measure up to others, and, although others show concern because of my inadequacies, I want to overcome in a useful way these deficiencies and fears, particularly my fear of death (ERS 1, 3, 6). I am indifferent to the criticisms of others and skeptical of their beliefs, religious and otherwise (ERS 4, 5). Furthermore, I am not deterred by their pessimistic attitudes—they only strengthen my resolve (ERS 3, 4). By focusing on my actions and movements and by experimenting on my own, I will be able to overcome these obstacles and thereby discover the truth (ERS 5, 6).

Actions speak louder than words, and I judge people by their actions and not their intentions (ERS 1, 2). If you don't have and show concern for others, it doesn't matter what else you feel (ER 2).

FREUD'S MEMORIES

ER 1. Age 2. Freud would still wet his bed, and it was his father . . . who reproved him. He recollected saying on one of these occasions: "Don't worry, Papa. I will buy you a beautiful new red bed" (13, p. 7).

This recollection carries the message: Words speak louder than actions—don't look at my deeds, notice instead my good intentions. It also includes concern with a specific organic function and a father-son controversy, both of which became prominent in Freud's theory. The mention of color in a recollection is generally considered to indicate an aesthetic interest.

ER 2. Age 2 1/2. Freud's Nannie disappeared. . . . Having reason to suspect his brother's implication in the disappearance, Freud asked him what had become of her and received the . . . answer: "*Sie ist eingekastelt.*" An adult would have understood this as meaning: "She has been locked up in prison," but Freud took it more literally as "she has been put in a chest" (13, pp. 9-10).

Freud is looking for answers, and upon receiving an answer, interprets it in an unusual way, which differs from the conventional meaning.

ER 3. Age 3. On the way to Leipzig the train passed through Breslau, where Freud saw gas jets for the first time; they made him think of "souls burning in hell" (13, p. 13).

We might think of this as the forerunner of free association. There is an interest in symbolism and in religion.

ER 4. Age 6. I was expected to believe that we were all made of earth and must therefore return to earth. This did not suit me and I expressed doubts of the doctrine. My mother thereupon rubbed the palms of her hands together—just as she did in making dumplings, except that there was no dough between them—and showed me the blackish scales of *epidermis* produced by the friction as a proof that we were made of earth. My astonishment at this ocular demonstration knew no bounds and I acquiesced in the belief which I was later to hear expressed in the words: "Thou owest Nature a death" (9, p. 238).

Freud is skeptical of statements made by others, but will acquiesce when shown "evidence." He is concerned with death, particularly with its inevitability. This recollection is consonant with his later theory of Thanatos.

ER 5. Age 7 or 8. Freud recalls having urinated (deliberately) in his parents' bedroom, and being reprimanded by his father, who said, "That boy will never amount to anything" (13, p. 16).

Freud is deliberately provocative and evokes negative attention. Others will judge him negatively. In addition there are the organic function and the father-son controversy of ER 1.

Summary. Summarizing Freud's memories, we construct the following picture: I am a skeptic and a doubter who is looking for answers (ERS 2, 4). I see and interpret things in a non-conventional, non-obvious way (ERS 2, 3). I am deliberately provocative (ER 5). I give meanings to things which others don't share. I will alter my ideas when they are contradicted by the "evidence" (ER 4).

People should judge me by my intentions rather than by my actions (ER 1). Through my natural urges I am likely to get into trouble with the authorities (ERS 1, 5). I am awed by the inevitability of death (ER 4).

This last point reminds us of Freud's death instinct hypothesis: "If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that the aim of all life is death" (10, p. 70). The preceding point is a reminder of Freud's concepts of the Oedipus complex and of the repression of drives.

JUNG'S MEMORIES

ER 1. Age about 4. Strangers, bustle, excitement. The maid comes running and exclaims, "The fishermen have found a corpse—came down the Falls—they want to put it in the wash house!" My father says, "Yes, yes." I want to see the dead body at once. My mother holds me back and sternly forbids me to go into the garden. When all the men had left, I quickly stole into the garden to the washhouse. But the door was locked. I went around the house; at the back there was an open drain running down the slope, and I saw blood and water trickling out. I found this extraordinarily interesting (15, p. 7).

Jung finds death interesting. Women try to prevent him from satisfying his curiosity. He doesn't give up. He is determined to have his way.

ER 2. Age 3 or 4. One hot summer day I was sitting alone, as usual, on the road in front of the house, playing in the sand. The road led past the house up a hill, then disappeared in the wood on the hilltop. . . . Looking up the road, I saw a figure in a strangely broad hat and a long black garment coming down from the wood. It looked like a man wearing women's clothes. Slowly the figure drew nearer, and I could now see that it really was a man wearing a kind of black robe that reached to his feet. At the sight of him I was overcome with fear, which rapidly grew into deadly terror as the frightful recognition shot through my mind: "That is a Jesuit." The man coming down the road must be in disguise, I thought; that was why he wore women's clothes. Probably he had evil intentions. Terrified, I ran helter-skelter into the house, rushed up the stairs, and hid under a beam in the darkest corner of the attic. I don't know how long I remained there, but it must have been a fairly long time, because, when I ventured down again to the first floor and cautiously stuck my head out of the window, far and wide there was not a trace of the black figure to be seen (15, pp. 10-11).

Jung tries to reconcile discrepant observations. He corrects his conclusions on the basis of closer observations. His statement that he is alone "as usual" suggests that being alone is characteristic for him. When he is terrified, he runs and hides. There is confusion with respect to religion and perhaps masculinity and femininity. Either Catholicism, the confusion, or both frighten him.

ER 3. Age about 6. An aunt showed me the stuffed animals in the museum. We stayed a long time, because I wanted to look at everything very carefully. At four o'clock the bell rang, a sign that the museum was about to close. My aunt nagged at me, but I could not tear myself away from the showcases. In the meantime, the room had been locked, and we had to go by another way to the staircase, through the gallery of antiquities. Suddenly I was standing before these marvelous figures! Utterly overwhelmed, I opened my eyes wide, for I had never seen anything so beautiful. I could not look at them long enough. My aunt pulled me by the hand to the exit—I trailing always a step behind her

—crying out, “Disgusting boy, shut your eyes; disgusting boy, shut your eyes!” Only then did I see that the figures were naked and wore fig leaves. I hadn’t noticed it at all before. Such was my first encounter with the fine arts. My aunt was simmering with indignation, as though she had been dragged through a pornographic institute (15, p. 16).

Jung is observing again. A woman is interfering with his aesthetic searches. He focuses on the artistic beauty in things, where others may only see the erotic-sexual aspects. It will be recalled in this connection that Jung “de-sexualized” libido in his theory, saying that the so-called “primal” sexual libido should be considered a universal “life-urge” (7, pp. 49-50; 14, pp. 120-121). Some people make excessive fuss regarding sexual matters.

ER 4. Age 2 or 3. A lovely summer evening. An aunt said to me, “Now I am going to show you something.” She took me out in front of the house, on the road to Dachsen. On the far horizon the chain of the Alps lay bathed in glowing sunset reds. The Alps could be seen very clearly that evening. “Now look over there”—I can hear her saying to me in Swiss dialect—“the mountains are all red.” For the first time I consciously saw the Alps. Then I was told that the next day the village children would be going on a school outing to the Alps, near Zurich. I wanted so much to go, too. To my sorrow, I was informed that children as small as I could not go along; there was nothing to be done about it. From then on the Alps and Zurich became an unattainable land of dreams, near to the glowing, snow-covered mountains (15, p. 7).

Someone is opening the world to Jung. Becoming conscious of things is important. The mention of color suggests an artistic orientation again. He is little and is left out because of it; he does not get to the Promised Land.

ER 5. Age about 4. I am restive, feverish, unable to sleep. My father carries me in his arms, paces up and down, singing his old student songs. I particularly remember one I was especially fond of and which always used to soothe me. To this day I can remember my father’s voice, singing over me in the stillness of the night (15, p. 8).

Others soothe him when he’s uncomfortable. He is sensitive to voice quality and music. He is interested in contrast and opposites.

ER 6. Age about 4. Fourteen people were drowned and were carried down by the yellow flood water to the Rhine. When the water retreated, some of the corpses got stuck in the sand. When I was told about it, there was no holding me. I actually found the body of a middle-aged man, in a black frock coat; apparently he had just come from church. He lay half covered by sand, his arm over his eyes (15, p. 15).

While death horrifies others, it interests Jung. He is not afraid to look where others are afraid. Once again, color suggests an artistic sense. Can he be saying that church-goers can come to a horrible end?

Summary. All of Jung's memories may be summarized as follows: I am a sensitive, curious observer, and I experience the world through all my senses (ERS 3, 4, 5). Becoming aware and conscious of things is very important to me (ER 4). I am interested in contrasts (ERS 2, 5), try to reconcile discrepant observations, and I will modify my conclusions if they prove wrong after closer observation (ER 2).

Life is wonderful when I can be alone with nature (ER 2), but people can come between me and nature (ER 3). I am infatuated by the artistic beauty in what I see (ERS 3, 4, 6), though others are attracted only to the erotic and sexual aspects (ER 3). Others can interfere with my aesthetic search and they may also try to prevent me from satisfying my curiosity (ERS 1, 3). They can also open my eyes to new horizons, however (ER 4).

I am interested in death, although it may horrify others (ERS 1, 6).

I am small and want others to do things for me and care for me (ER 5). Smallness can also be a liability in human relations, but it is not a handicap in relation to nature (ER 4).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

When we compare the portraits of these three men drawn from their memories, one similarity is that each of them emerges as a thinker and inquirer. Adler, Freud, and Jung draw conclusions from "evidence," and all three test and modify their beliefs in the light of facts. However, their style of inquiry distinguishes them from each other. Jung observes through his senses, Freud symbolizes and makes unique interpretations, and Adler observes and compares the actions and movements of people. Also, Freud and Adler display a generally skeptical stance toward traditional explanations.

Although all three show an interest in death, they differ in their approach to it. Jung is intrigued by death, Freud is awed by death's inevitability, while Adler resolves to work to overcome death. Also, Jung's interest in nature, art, and in the contrasting juxtaposition of things differs from Adler's preoccupation with people's actions and interactions, with deficiencies, and with overcoming obstacles; while Freud's main interest is in explaining things in non-conventional ways.

You will note that each man secured the involvement of other

people, but in a different manner: Freud by being provocative, Adler by displaying and overcoming inadequacy, and Jung by being small and helpless, although there is the danger that being small and helpless could also result in his being left out. Though Freud anticipates that his provocative behavior may result in negative attention from others, he shrugs it off—it does not bother him. Adler also anticipates criticism from others, but he is ready to respond to it with increased effort and resolve. Jung similarly anticipates trouble from others, expecting them to interfere with his attempts to get closer to the experience of nature and to satisfy his curiosity.

Reflections of each man's theoretical position appear in their recollections. Adler's ERs allude to organ inferiority (ER 1), to movement (ERS 1, 2), to inferiority feeling (ERS 3, 6), to compensation (ERS 3, 6), and to social feeling (ER 2). Freud's ERs allude to free association (ER 3), the oedipal situation (ERS 1, 5), symbolic interpretation (ER 3), non-conventional interpretations (ER 2), and the death instinct (ER 4). Jung's desexualization of libido, the reconciliation of opposites in his typology, his interest in artistic production may all be discerned in his ERs.

Finally, the dominant life goals of each man emerge from their recollections. Adler's goal is to overcome inadequacy through effort and resolve. Freud strives to comprehend through analysis and interpretation, while Jung moves toward communion with nature through sensual awareness. Note also that feelings play a different role in the pursuit of each man's goal. For Adler, feelings facilitate and energize his movement; for Jung, feelings are another dimension of sensual experience; while Freud de-emphasizes the role of feelings, stressing intellectual understanding instead.

SUMMARY

Early childhood memories recalled by Adler, Freud, and Jung are presented, interpreted, and summarized within an Adlerian framework. Similarities between the early recollection themes and each man's theoretical position are indicated. Finally, the three sets of memories are compared and the commonalities and distinguishing characteristics that emerge are noted.

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