

The Fundamental Views of Individual Psychology

Alfred Adler

In introducing the *International Journal of Individual Psychology* in the United States and Great Britain, it seems fitting to describe the basic structure of Individual Psychology, in order to show the contributions of this science to modern psychology and psychiatry. I do not want to go into details here. Those details will be found in the articles of the contributors to this Journal. It is only the scientific framework that I want to explain very briefly.

The raw material with which the Individual Psychologist works is: The *relationship* of the individual to the problems of the outside world. The Individual Psychologist has to observe how a particular individual relates himself to the outside world. This outside world includes the individual's own body, his bodily functions, and the functions of his mind. He does not relate himself to the outside world in a predetermined manner as often assumed. He relates himself always according to his own interpretation of himself and of his present problem. His limits are not only the common human limits, but also the limits which he has set himself. It is neither heredity nor environment which determines his relationship to the outside world. Heredity only endows him with certain abilities. Environment only gives him certain impressions. These abilities and impressions, and the manner in which he "experiences" them—that is to say, the interpretation he makes of these experiences—are the bricks which he uses in his own "creative" way in building up his attitude toward life. It is his individual way of using these bricks—or in other words, it is his attitude toward life—which determines his relationship to the outside world.

He meets problems which are entirely different from those of his forebears. He sees all problems from a perspective which is his own creation. He sees the environment which trains him, with his own self-created perspective, and accordingly changes its effect upon him for better or worse. There is a task in life which no individual can escape. It is to solve a great number of problems. These problems are in no way accidental. I have divided them for clarity into three parts: problems of behavior toward others; problems of occupation; and problems of love. The manner in which an individual behaves toward these three problems and their subdivisions—that is his answer to the problems of life.

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Life (and all psychic expressions as part of life) moves ever toward “overcoming,” toward perfection, toward superiority, toward success. You cannot train or condition a living being for defeat. But what an individual thinks or feels as success (i.e., as a goal acceptable to him), that is his own matter. In my experience I have found that each individual has a different meaning of, and attitude toward, what constitutes success. Therefore a human being cannot be typified or classified. I believe it is because of parsimony of language that many scientists have come to mistaken conclusions—believing in types, entities, racial qualities, etc. Individual Psychology recognizes, with other psychologies, that each individual must be studied in the light of his own peculiar development. To present the individual understandably, in words, requires an extensive reviewing of all of his facets, the elaborate demands of which are apparent in the articles which follow. Yet, too often, psychologists are tempted away from this recognition, and take the easier but unfruitful roads of classification. That is a temptation to which, in practical work, we must never yield. It is for teaching purposes only—to illuminate the broad field—that I designate here four different types, in order, temporarily, to classify the attitude and behavior of individuals toward outside problems.

Thus, we find individuals whose approach to reality shows, from early childhood through their entire lives, a more or less dominant or “ruling” attitude. This attitude appears in all their relationships. A second type—surely the most frequent one—expects everything from others and leans on others. I might call it the “getting” type. A third type is inclined to feel successful by avoiding the solution of problems. Instead of struggling with a problem, a person of this type merely tries to “side-step” it, in an effort thereby to avoid defeat. The fourth type struggles, to a greater or lesser degree, for a solution to these problems in a way that is useful to others.

It is necessary to say here that each special type retains his style from childhood to the end of his life, unless he is convinced of the mistake in his creation of his attitude toward reality. As I have said before, this style is the creation of the child himself, who uses inheritance and impressions of the environment as bricks in building his particular avenue for success—success according to his own interpretation.

Individual Psychology goes beyond the views of philosophers like Kant and newer psychologists and psychiatrists who have accepted the idea of the *totality* of the human being. Very early in my work, I found him to be a *unity*! The foremost task of Individual Psychology is to prove this unity in each individual—in his thinking, feeling, acting; in his so-called conscious and unconscious—in every expression of his personality. This unity we call the “Life-Style” of the individual. What is frequently labeled “the ego” is nothing more than the style of the individual.

Individual Psychology has shown that the first three types mentioned above—the “ruling” type, the “getting” type, and the “avoiding” type—are

not apt, and are not prepared, to solve the problems of life. These problems are always social problems. Individuals of these three types are lacking in the ability for co-operation and contribution. The class between such a life-style (lacking social interest) and the outside problems (demanding social interest) results in shock. This shock leads up to the individual's failures—which we know as neurosis, psychosis, etc. Significantly, the failure shows the same style as the individual. As I mentioned before, the life-style persists.

In the fourth type (the socially useful type), prepared for co-operation and contribution, we can always find a certain amount of *activity* which is used for the benefit of others. This activity is in agreement with the needs of others; it is useful, normal, rightly imbedded in the stream of evolution of mankind.

The first type also has activity, but not enough social interest. Therefore, if confronted strongly by a situation which he feels to be in the nature of an examination, a test of his social value, a judgment upon his social usefulness, a person of this type acts in an unsocial way. The more active of this type attack others directly: they become delinquents, tyrants, sadists. It is as if they said, with Richard III, "And therefore, since I cannot be a lover, I am determined to prove a villain." To this type also belong suicidals, drug addicts, drunkards—whose lesser degree of activity causes them to attack others indirectly: They make attacks upon themselves for the purpose of hurting others. The second and third types show even less activity, and not much social interest. This lack appears also in the expression of their shock results, which are neuroses and psychoses.

The principles which guide me when grouping individuals into these four types are (1) the degree of their approach to social integration and (2) the form of movement which they develop (with greater or lesser activity) to maintain that degree of approach in a manner which they regard as most likely to achieve success (in their own interpretation).

But it is the individual shade of interpretation that matters in the end. And when reconstructing the unity of a personality in his relationships to the outer world, Individual Psychology fundamentally undertakes to delineate the individual form of creative activity—which is the life-style.

I should not like to close this short introduction to Individual Psychology without saying that a great improvement in the next generation can be assured by preventive work; while the treatment and cure of the numerous failures and mal-adjustments of our time are wholly dependent upon increasing the degree of social feeling and cooperation. For difficult times like ours, the inherited potentiality for human cooperation does not suffice. It must be further developed. The necessity and importance of this development are inherent in the discoveries of Individual Psychology—and the scientific method by which it may be accomplished is its contribution to the advancement of mankind.

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Overcoming Difficulties

Alfred Adler, M.D.

"Difficulties exist in order to be overcome." -- Alfred Adler (1870-1937)

"In Individual Psychology we are looking for the situation in which a person feels confronted and does not feel able to overcome a certain problem or difficulty. Therefore, we have to look for the direction in which such a person is striving." -- Alfred Adler (1870-1937), "The Case of Mrs. A," in "Superiority and Social Interest," edited by Heinz and Rowena Ansbacher.

"True strength can never be derived only from talent but from the courageous struggle with difficulties." -- Alfred Adler (1870-1937)

"To me it appears that every child, indeed every human being, for some reason, is continually striving to answer questions, to overcome difficulties, to solve riddles, and to develop himself in some degree towards a self-satisfying completion, the full achievement of his life purpose. No matter what may be the age of an individual, you will find tendencies which have their beginnings--if one may venture to use the phrase--in the dawn of life, and which, by their persistence, ever demand a development to a higher level." -- Alfred Adler (1870-1937), "The Cause and Prevention of Neuroses," IZIP, Vol 5, 1927.

"Of particular significance in the course of my examinations, was finding the importance extending over the entire lifespan of overcoming, of the onset of difficulties. This seems to lead to an apparent paradox that perhaps great achievements regularly come from courageously overcoming obstacles, and are not a consequence of original aptitude, but rather the absence of aptitude." -- Alfred Adler (1870-1937). From a new translation of "Einführung in die neuere Psychologie," Osterwick/Harz. Published by Zickfeld) 1926, in the AAISF/ATP Archives.

"True strength can never be derived only from talent but from the courageous struggle with difficulties. Whoever overcomes wins." -- Alfred Adler (1870-

1937), Progress in Individual Psychology - Part II," IZIP, 1924, a new translation in the AAISF/ATP Archives.

"In Individual Psychology we are looking for the situation in which a person feels confronted and does not feel able to overcome a certain problem or difficulty. Therefore, we have to look for the direction in which such a person is striving." -- Alfred Adler (1870-1937), "The Case of Mrs. A," in "Superiority and Social Interest," edited by Heinz and Rowena Ansbacher.

"Geniuses get up early. I have found in all artists and geniuses that they had to overcome difficulties. This overcoming is a strong incentive. Diligence and interest. I agree with Goethe who said: 'Genius probably is only diligence.'" -- Alfred Adler (1870-1937). From a new translation of an unpublished lecture "Aptitude, Childhood Memories," given at Diesterweg University, March 4, 1932, by Alfred Adler, in the AAISF/ATP Archives.

About people – a work in progress!

“Normal” individuals say “Yes...and” to life.

Encouraging mostly

Social interested mostly

“Neurotic” individuals say “Yes...but” to life.

Encouraging some of the time

Social interested some of the time

“Psychotic” individuals say “No!” to life.

Encouraging occasionally.

Social interested occasionally.

ALLOWING TWO TRUTHS TO **CO-EXIST** IN YOUR HEALING JOURNEY...

- I am making progress in my healing journey **AND** I still struggle at times.
- I have expectations for people in my life **AND** I don't expect "perfect."
- I can express my needs **AND** I recognize they won't always be met.
- I am working hard on processing my trauma **AND** I still get triggered.
- I can make decisions with the information I have at the time **AND** I can allow myself to change my mind when things aren't right for me.
- I am putting in the work to make changes **AND** I still mess up.
- I am learning to trust others **AND** sometimes I fear being abandoned.
- I can set boundaries with others **AND** can choose when to be flexible.
- I have days when things feel great **AND** days when things feel too hard.
- I am aware that healing & personal growth is a lot of work **AND** I am choosing to do it anyway.

talking to a friend vs. therapy.

talking to a friend

therapy

@figoththerapy

getting support or advice

expectation of **reciprocity**

your friends may not always have the **time** or **energy** to focus on you

hearing a new perspective based on their worldview and preferences

you might not be able to be fully **honest**

a way to **bond** & strengthen friendship

helping you find your own answers

you get to focus on **you**

using a wide variety of **personalized** techniques and approaches

a good therapist is **non-judgmental** and their perspective is more objective and **theoretically informed**

confidentiality

targeted, evidence-based solutions

helpful for mental health and wellbeing

can be essential for mental health maintenance

helpful for hearing new perspectives

a part of your **support system**

SAFEGUARDING/SAFEGUARDING TENDENCY

Note: Page numbers enclosed in parentheses are citations from *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler: A systematic presentation in selections from his writings*. (H. L. and R. R. Ansbacher, Eds.). © 1964, Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. Used by permission of Perseus Books Group.

Safeguarding refers to the mistaken movement of the discouraged person in thought, feeling, and action in response to perceived threats to his or her self-esteem. Safeguards may be expressed in anxiety, panic attacks, or paralysis, more or less severe, and all relative to the individual's degree of discouragement or diminished sense of social feeling and connectedness. Safeguarding may show itself in such forms as a claim to being "above it all," marking time, hesitation, or retreat, all of which may be understood as similar in function to the defense mechanisms later posited by other psychological systems. In psychoanalytic theory the "ego" is protected by certain "mechanisms of defense" from recognizing and having to acknowledge the anti-social instincts of the "id." Adler saw the matter differently: What had to be hidden and unacknowledged were not abhorrent impulses, but the cowardice and retreat of the unprepared person, whose confidence in the face of an imperative task is shaken by thoughts of possible failure. From the subjective sense of the individual, the safeguard protects a *pretense* of superiority, not guaranteed by common sense, in addressing life's ordinary challenges. (Consider Aesop's fable of the fox that, unable to jump high enough to reach a bunch of ripe grapes, walks away dismissing them as sour grapes, so he wouldn't have wanted them anyway.)

Through the safeguarding tendency the individual aims at getting rid of the feeling of inferiority (pp. 109-110).

I have repeatedly described "safeguarding tendencies" as the essential character trait of the neurosis. They are evoked by the oversensitivity of the neurotic and his fear of disparagement and disgrace (p. 109).

Over-valuations of one's own achievements and goals serve the same purpose; they are . . . arranged by, and originate in, the

exaggerated safeguarding tendency against the feeling of being "below" (p. 268).

The superiority and safeguarding of the patient can be seen from a fiction which begins with an "if" clause: "If I didn't have . . . [this affliction], I would be the first" (p. 275).

All neurotic symptoms have as their object the task of safeguarding the patient's self-esteem and thereby also the life-line [Lifestyle] (p. 263).

© Griffith, J., & Powers, R. L. (2007). *The Lexicon of Adlerian Psychology: 106 terms Associated with the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler* (2nd ed.). Port Townsend, WA: Adlerian Psychology Associates (p. 89).

Definitions of concepts are used by permission of Jane Griffith. A comprehensive list of concepts and definitions can be found in **The Lexicon of Adlerian Psychology: 106 Terms Associated with the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler** by Jane Griffith and Robert L. Powers, available for purchase on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Safeguarding Tendencies Categories with Definitions

Arthur J. Clark (2000) defined safeguarding tendencies developed by Alfred Adler:

Distancing Complex: Avoiding challenges and problems through disaffiliation from perceived obstacles, and expressing doubts and uncertainties that preclude the possibility of active problem-solving

Hesitating Attitude: Justifying restricted activity and involvement with problems due to various obstacles and misfortunes, and blaming others for hardships and impeding problem solutions

Detouring Around: Diverting attention to less significant concerns, and expending an extraordinary amount of energy on matters of secondary importance to central problems and challenges

Narrowed Path of Approach Hindering the pursuit of prominent problems by not completing tasks or making meager commitments to challenges outside of highly circumscribed or predictable endeavors

Clark, A.J. (2000). Safeguarding tendencies: Implications for the counseling process. *The Journal of Individual Psychology, 56(2)*, 192-204.

Lifestyle Summary
Developed by Arthur Clark Ed.D.

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I am

Others are

Events are

Life is

Clark, A. J. (2002). Early recollections: Theory and practice in counseling and psychotherapy. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge.

Felt minus to perceived plus

Alfred Adler (1870-1937) wrote in 1931: The whole of human life proceeds along this great line of action - from below to above, from minus to plus, from defeat to victory. The only individuals who can really meet and master the problems of life, however, are those who show in their striving a tendency to enrich everyone else, those who forge ahead in such a way that others benefit too.

Adler, A. (1931/1992). *What life could mean to you*. C. Brett, Trans. Oxford: Oneworld. DOI

*MEANINGS ARE NOT
DETERMINED BY
SITUATIONS, BUT WE
DETERMINE OURSELVES BY
THE MEANINGS WE GIVE
TO SITUATIONS.*

ALFRED ADLER



A Feeling Vocabulary

	ANGER	DEPRESSION	FEAR	ELATION
M	bugged	gloomy	shy	pleased
I	annoyed	low	uneasy	glad
L	irritated	sad	nervous	cheerful
D	irked	unhappy	worried	comfortable
	ruffled	drained	concerned	relaxed
	peevd	numb	apprehensive	amused
	put-upon	blue	up-tight	calm
M				
O	disgusted	disheartened	alarmed	delighted
D	ticked-off	hurt	scared	merry
E	mad	ashamed	afraid	bubbly
R	angry	down	frightened	tickled
A	riled	deflated	shaken	happy
T	hot	empty	threatened	joyous
E	smoldering	lonely	fearful	great
I	fed-up	miserable	horrified	sparkling
N	fuming	downcast	petrified	overjoyed
T	burned-up	crushed	fear-stricken	enthralled
E	furious	humiliated	terrified	elated
N	incensed	depressed	panicky	ecstatic
S	infuriated	abandoned	bullied	wonderful
E	enraged	tortured	dread	alive

Huber, C.H. & Baruth, L.G. (1981): Coping with marital conflict: An Adlerian approach to succeeding in marriage. Stipes Publishing Co.

I do not fix problems. I fix my
thinking & then problems fix
themselves!





Distancing Complex: Avoiding challenges and problems through disaffiliation from perceived obstacles, and expressing doubts and uncertainties that preclude the possibility of active problem-solving



Hesitating Attitude and Lifestyle Conclusions

Hesitating Attitude: Justifying restricted activity and involvement with problems due to various obstacles and misfortunes, and blaming others for hardships and impeding problem solutions

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“Perceived” plus

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Detouring Around and Lifestyle Conclusions

Detouring Around: Diverting attention to less significant concerns, and expending an extraordinary amount of energy on matters of secondary importance to central problems and challenges

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Narrowed Path of Approach and Lifestyle Conclusions

Narrowed Path of Approach: Hindering the pursuit of prominent by not completing tasks or making meager commitments to challenges outside of highly circumscribed or predictable endeavors

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5 Criteria for Rational Behavior

(Use these criteria to help determine if a thought or behavior is rational or irrational)

1. Is my thought or behavior based on Objective Reality? (Objective reality is not good or bad, right or wrong, should or should not). Objective reality is that which has its essentials for existence fulfilled.
2. Is my thought or behavior life or health preserving?
3. Is my thought or behavior goal producing (short term, mid term, and long term)?
4. Does my thought or behavior minimize significant (more than I am willing to tolerate) emotional conflict?
5. Does my thought or behavior minimize significant environmental conflict (more than I am willing to tolerate)?

Remember. What is rational for one person may or may not be rational for another person. Also, what is rational for one person today may or may not be rational for that person tomorrow, as circumstances change.

If you are going to use words like “should, need, must, have to, etc, be sure to add in parentheses (in order that). This will then give an operational definition.

These “5 Criteria for Rational Thinking” were developed and presented by Dr. Maxie C. Maultsby, Jr., M.D.

FEAR vs CAUTION

Copyright 1976
John F. Taylor, PhD

FEAR	CAUTION
1. Stagnates, immobilizes. Stagnates	Stimulates action
2. Induces danger	Prevents or reduces danger
3. Person becomes discouraged	Person becomes encouraged
4. Magnifies suffering	Decreases suffering
5. Manipulative of others	Manipulative of self
6. Withdrawal from and avoidance of stress	Approach and confrontation of stress
7. Based on ignorance	Based on knowledge
8. Focus is on the person, looking inward	Focus is on the situation, looking outward
9. Hypothetical – “What if ...”	Concrete – “What is ...”
10. Pessimistic – assumes that the person cannot master the situation	Optimistic – assumes that the person can master the situation

Reference

Maple Ridge Family guidance Centre Parent Study Group Leaders’ Manual.
(n.d.). E. C. Hawes (Ed.). Maple Ridge, BC

Excuses, Excuses

Why do we make excuses?

deflect blame
avoid responsibility
self-protect against anxiety and shame

What are the costs of making excuses?

lack of personal growth
loss of control
lower odds of future success

Is it an excuse, or a reason?

Reasons include circumstances and people out of your control, as well as your behaviors and decisions.

Excuses enable you to ignore that; focus you outward, instead of inward.

EXCUSE	SHIFT
  BUT I ALWAYS... You predict your behavior based on past experiences.	  CHALLENGE ASSOCIATIONS With practice, your brain can "unlearn" what it's been taught.
 I'M SO STRESSED Blame it on evolution - stress taps into our lizard brain and turns on the auto-pilot.	 NO TIME IS PERFECT Life is never stress-free. You can choose to make progress in less-than-ideal circumstances.
 I WAS GOOD ALL WEEK "I earned some extra goodies eating all those salads, right?"	 PRACTICE PERMISSION You never have to "earn" or "burn" your food. Give yourself unconditional permission to eat.
 I DIDN'T EAT ALL DAY "Now I can eat whatever I want!"	 IT'S A TRAP This will lead to overeating, feelings of guilt, and overcorrection.

EXCUSE



I'M TOO BUSY

Common excuse when "healthy eating" feels overwhelming or simply isn't a priority.



HEALTH FOOD IS EXPENSIVE

"How can I afford all that organic stuff at the health food store?"



I'LL JUST FAIL ANYWAYS

"Why bother? I've never been successful before." This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.



I LOVE TO EAT

So do we! Eating is supposed to be enjoyable.



I HAVE NO WILLPOWER

By assigning willpower magical status, you relinquish your control.



I'M ON VACATION

"Calories don't count when I'm at the beach!"

SHIFT



BREAK IT DOWN

Identify the simplest of things you can start practicing now.



REDEFINE "HEALTH" FOOD

To control costs, keep it simple, make it yourself, & watch portions.



THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS NOW

Maybe you just haven't discovered the strategies that will create sustainable change for YOU?



FIND THE BALANCE

In matters of nutrition, consider taste. In matters of taste, consider nutrition.



TAKE CONTROL

Look for ways to make the better choice the easy choice.



BE REALISTIC

Vacation should involve good food, but don't abandon your fundamental habits!

Four Steps in Changing a Pattern

Edith Dewey

1. **Recognize** the pattern.

2. **Catch** yourself being true to the pattern.

3. **Create** a new response.

4. **Repeat** the new response.

Dewey, E. (1978). *Basic applications of Adlerian psychology for self-understanding and human relationships*. Coral Springs, FL: CMTI Press.

MAY YOU
HAVE THE
COURAGE TO
BREAK THE
PATTERNS IN
YOUR LIFE THAT
ARE NO LONGER
SERVING YOU