

EXAMINATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL IMMUNE SYSTEM ON THE BASIS OF INDIVIDUAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE MEMORIES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD /DR. EDITH FERENCZ, SZÉLESNÉ/

I. The object of the dissertation and the definition of its subject-matter

„EXAMINATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL IMMUNE SYSTEM ON THE BASIS OF INDIVIDUAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE MEMORIES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD” – THIS is the title of the dissertation, which, in accordance with the abovementioned, integrates two thematic units and two different aspects; these are, because of the dynamic mutual effects of phenomena related with each other.

The purpose of the *dissertation* is to introduce one of its methods used in the course of individual – psychological psychotherapy. This is the analysis of the memories of early childhood. By making known the examination results it purposes to demonstrate their usefulness in lifestyle diagnostics. For this reason we have described the 'psychological immune system' of the personality, trying to bring into connection the contents of the memories with those personal characteristics which are stress resistant.

A further purpose of this work is to show the coincidence of the integrative theory of individual psychology – which attaches a great importance to the problem solving ability of personality on the one hand, and the theory that favors the cognitive-interactive capacity, on the other hand.

In the process of psychotherapy and communication between the therapist and his client a biographical scrap of memory appears, a memory of the early childhood. These contents are revived through the emotional effect of their relationship and in accordance with their disposition. So through the emotive experience arisen in the course of therapy the lifestyle of personality can also be changed and corrected. Among the profound psychological tendencies it is *Alfred Adler's individual psychology* which both in theory and in practice of therapy attaches great importance to recollection and interpretation of experiences of *the early childhood* and considers them vital in the planning of personality's '*lifestyle*'. According to the theory of individual psychology, functioning of the personality is realized in its lifestyle. This is a principle which expresses the uniqueness of the individual. The actions of the individual derive from his/her lifestyle, in the same way

as the psychical functions are in accordance with the lifestyle. So the manners of behavior of the personality, such as seeking after superiority, the inferiority, feelings, the mode of compensation, the ability of creation – self-creation, and the fictitious tendencies, manifest themselves in the lifestyle. Within *the lifestyle the theory of individual psychology*, also describes a hierarchically superior cognitive structure, whose function is characteristic of selective reception of information, specifying treatment of information, and a special organization of action. The person's lifestyle and the behavior characteristic of it can easily be understood in the light of those problems and difficulties with which the person has to be confronted, because „in need” one adopts measures which in accordance with one's personal logic since his/her childhood has seemed to result in success. Adler's conception implies transcending the earlier levels of development, cultivating talents, acquiring the control over situations, dynamically to overcome the current defects and insufficiencies, and master problematical situations and anguish; compensation of drawback feeling by accomplishment. In the behavior and cognitive psychology the problem solving attitude and the reactions to difficulties and failures are differentiated with the conceptions coping, control and psychological immune system. Thus Adler became the herald of the theory of „striving mechanisms” which later (1966) was described by Lazarus. When it is especially difficult for one to comply with a given situation, i.e. in case of stress or anguish, he/she may value his/her personal importance through the lifestyle he/she leads. How the personality can adopt oneself to the circumstances in the course of optimum striving how much effective for the ego is the striving after superiority, whether it is expedient or inexpedient, depends on how much material, social or psychological „wealth” can be mobilized.

This scope of interpretation encourages further research, the examination of the personality's lifestyle on the basis of the memories of early childhood, in order to find connection between the stress-resistant characteristics and the level of psychological immune system.

II. Procedures adopted

Raising the question

The first memories photograph the prototype of one's lifestyle, since according to the notion of individual psychology, the subjective 'tendentious apperception' selects the memories, and this purposeful psychical unity exercises an influence on accomplishment of the memory. The opinions, intentions, dispositions, interests, and even the „style of action” of the child are all crystallized by the first memories. (Adler, 1931/1994) Already here are perceptible those things to which he/she will later orientate his/her actions. According to the individual psychology, the memories of the childhood are considered as intelligible and immediately recognizable manifestations of personality. So the specific tendencies of behavior and frame of mind can be used for diagnostic purposes. On the basis of the ascertainments above the conclusion can be drawn that the contents of the memories of childhood are related with a wide spectrum of personal characteristics.

That these contents can be revealed from several aspects, and safely made of in the preventive diagnostic work.

Hypothesis

- ***The quality of psychological immune system can be predicted by the individual psychological analysis of memories of early childhood adopted in the lifestyle diagnostics.***
- ***The contents of the memories of early childhood and all what they represent show the strength of the personal characteristics making up the psychological immune system.***

On the basis of the theory of individual psychology one can expect the people to be *autonomous, leading a brave lifestyle, and to have an explicit feeling of self-valuation*, that they can effectively master the problems with confidence, initiative activity, and a well developed community feeling, what is more, they dispose of a strong „psychological immune system”. *Such lifestyle is characteristic of one who has had positive experiences in his memories of early childhood, whose behavior is active and he/she is co-operative with an ability to change and with a positive ego-ideal.*

Methods

A, Lifestyle-diagnosis: Individual psychological analysis of the memories of early childhood

Alfred Adler *believed that the first, earliest memories of a person which he/she can remember and relate are very important for a better understanding of lifestyle.* As his starting point he took the idea that the mode of struggling for a dominating superior position refers to the whole personality, and this is so at every stage of spiritual development.

Since 1907 Adler had firmly believed that the person takes an active part in selection of his memories. From among the countless impressions of the childhood the person selects just those which he/she though vaguely thinks to have a great importance at the time of recollection. Memories are the embodiment of a life story which the person has created for himself and he/she suggests it to himself over and over again. Those objective data which don't suit the created life story he/she tendentiously sorts out with the help of the perceptive scheme. They are then changed or left out.

By recognition the importance of first memories the individual psychology took a great step forward. By right interpretation of conscious memories one can obtain an insight into the very depth of personality. We can also get diagnostic basis for our medicating and preventive work by analyzing those memories.

An individual psychological structuralized interview to help the analysis of the memories of early childhood

There are only a few systematic operationalizations of lifestyle, almost all of which come from the USA. In Europe the individual psychological research pledged oneself mainly to examine individual cases ideographically, on a high level. Since the individual psychology is a psychological and therapeutical tendency, which interprets the personality in his/her „thousand-colored individuality“, using in the first place the profound psychology hermeneutical and intuitive means of a qualified therapist, therefore the development of empiric-statistical examination methods was not advisable, neither from historical nor from theoretical point of view. Besides, Alfred Adler was most practical person who used to concentrate on how to help a certain

patient, this is why, both for theoretical and practical reasons he examined individual cases.

Thus he himself did not prepare any question forms intended for group examination. These are the reasons why the theme in operationalized lifestyle available is not sufficient for purposes of empiric research, as it has already been mentioned. However, the theoretical basis of this work is mainly Alfred Adler's fundamental conception which is connected with his primary complex profound psychological orientation. Thus in defining the lifestyle we didn't make use of any former tests of preceding individual psychological researches.

To reveal the contents of the memories of early childhood we made an individual structuralized interview. This we made up by the directions of Louis (1985). Such method of analysis has been accepted in the psychotherapical practice of individual psychology, and helps to understand the intuitive subjective experiences and the lifestyle.

The interviews were recorded the years 2002-2004, during the term-time.

The answers given to the questions during the interview have been analyzed with a method used in contents analysis. The interviewed person, on the basis of his/her memories from the early childhood and observing the standpoints of individual psychology, formulated his answers and analyzed his/her frame of mind. The interviewing person, when needed, advanced the process of recollection with encouragement and reassurance. The given answers were then classified.

The categories thus established were converted into a measurable clear result by adoption a mathematical statistical method, a scattering analysis /ANOVA test/, and with a two-sampled t-test.

B, Examination of psychological immune system

The psychological immune system was defined by Oláh Attila (2004, 654). The expression in itself refers to the Adler's opinion who said that the personality is the living mutual effect of body and soul, (Adler, 1931/1994, 25). When the psychical characteristics of a personality are organized in a way which provides an immunity, it can be expected that by gradual formation, developing and strengthening these dimensions the „gist” of the curing, preventive psychical process will be sized.

In the course of personal evolution the confrontation with tasks of life can become a trial, because of the crises caused by failure in filling the requirements of

evolution on the hand, or due to the crucial situations arisen by interpersonal, in a wider sense social phenomena and circumstances.

From among the possible answers given we were mainly interested in behaviors and lifestyle characteristics which represent the coping-potential dimensions of psychological immune system, because these may guarantee success in getting over crucial situations arisen in the course of performing the tasks of life.

The lifestyle of the individual can be differentiated and described by its characteristic features: by *the feeling of self value*, or inferiority feelings, by degree of *community feeling*, or social alienation, *on the basis of activity or inactivity*, by *readiness to compensate*, by manifestation vigor or weakness, and by the social tendencies of all these compensational features; whether it is socially useful, constructive or socially worthless i.e. destructive.

Question form for examination the psychological immune system

To examine the dimensions of strategy of tackling we used a question form which includes the tackling potentials, as they are called, the Psychological Immune System elaborated by Oláh Attila in 1996. (Oláh, 1996/1999)

The question form has 16 graduations which correspond to a tackling potential dimension each. It is measured by four degree graduation to what extent a given statement fits the examined person. Every scale consists of 5 statements.

The question forms were filled in after the individual psychological interview individually, in order to prevent the influence of the test items on the contents of memories.

Examination sample

In our examination took part 144 volunteer students of teacher's training college. Their selection was founded on the individual psychological argument which states that after the trial of adolescence the lifestyle of the personality usually takes shape so he/she should be able to fulfill the tasks of life.

The mean age of the examined persons was 22.2 years.

As for the division by sexes, 18 per cent (%) of participants were men.

III. Results

A, Comparison of coping potential dimensions of psychological immune system on the basis of the EGO-IDEAL of the memories.

The characteristic features of early childhood which, in the course of self valuation the examined persons brought to the surface, the manner of self-characterization was divided into three groups.

The positive ego-ideal: When the examined person in his/her memories endows himself with definitely positive idealized features, such as effective, competent, full of vigor, in community ready to co-operate and successful in his achievements, and sees himself as brave, lively, strong, reliable, self-confident, curious, helpful, etc.

Negative ego-ideal: The examined person characterized himself as definitely incompetent weak person, and also undervalued, unsuccessful in his personal relations and achievements and deviant.

Combined characteristics: The examined person in his/her memories characterized himself as a more colored differentiated person, with both positive and negative features, as arrogantly curious and, though impudent, a sensible person. In the coping potential dimensions of ANOVA test, on $p < 0,005$ level, between the groups of people who assigned themselves only *positive* and those with *negative qualities*, we found the following significant deviations:

The psychological immune system of those who had in their memories only positive qualities, showed a higher level in its dimensions of impulse control and irritability inhibition.

This means that those who in their memories of early childhood assigned themselves positive qualities have more effective self regulation mechanisms. They can control their behavior even under bad accommodation conditions. They are able to effectively anticipate the possible consequences of their reactions, and try to choose the most suitable and effective attitude needed. Their *irritability inhibition* function is also effective; they are able rationally to control impulses, fury and resentment, and to make use of the fury in a constructive way.

The results show that a positive self valuation as *lifestyle* is due to the person's positive memories: if the personality in his/her memories designs himself as successful and effective, it refers to maturity of his/her psychological immune competence and also to effectiveness of control functions.

B, Comparison of the coping potential dimensions of psychological immune system considering the AMOUNT OF EMOTIONS in the memories

The emotional experiences of person's memories we divided into three categories.

The harmony and poise we ranged among ***positive feelings***: joy, happiness, poise and pride are all positive feelings.

Among ***negative feelings*** we ranged those emotions which mean discomfort for the personality. Such are anguish, fear, consciousness of guilt, sadness, fury, etc.

Among ***ambivalent feelings*** of memories were ranged contrasting feelings experienced toward the same „matter” either at the same time or one after the other. (Such were joy-sadness, or curiosity-consciousness of guilt, etc.)

It has been found from the results of examinations that those who remembered *the happenings of childhood with positive feelings*, in the consequent dimensions reached a significantly higher level of psychological immune system ($p < 0,05$), than those who had *definitely negative memories*. *'Positive way of thinking, unity of personality, self respect, feeling of growth, ingenuity, feeling of self-effectiveness, social creativity, ability to synchronize and persistency are their characteristics.'*

Under harder accommodation conditions these persons can be expected with a success oriented optimistic attitude, creatively to understand and perceive relations; that they strive to retain their assets, and to self-realization, purpose-oriented and by liberation considerable social creativity, and with high concentration of attention they steadily strive to master stressful situations.

Those young people who have *ambivalent emotions*, significantly differ (at $p < 0,05$) level from people with negative attitude by their *'positive way of thinking, feeling of unity, self-respect, ingenuity, the feeling of self-effectiveness, ability to synchronize and by ability to control emotions.'* Since they are able to *control emotions* in a highest degree, it can be expected that they are also able to convert negative emotions into constructive behavior in the most excellent way.

C, Comparison of coping potential dimensions of psychological immune system according to the change in *EMOTIONS OF THE MEMORY*

We established two groups. One was made up of persons whose memories of the early childhood involved for the most part *negative feelings* which could be due to disappointment following expectations or ill success...

The members of the second group were those who remembered negative states turning into *positive dispositions*. For example, their anguish turned into calm, or from an instable position they got to safety...

The stress resistant characteristic features are more intense in the members of the second group. There is a significant ($p < 0,05$ level) difference between the following variable quantities: '*positive way of thinking, unity of the personality, self-respect, the feeling of growth, and the control of emotions.*' Those people who have the memory of a situation which had been threatening their psychical equipoise and then turned into a positive emotion either they, or somebody else for them optimistically look forward to success, but they also can understand and be sensible of rational changes and positions. They believe they can comprehend the tasks and challenges and once they understand they will be able to accomplish them. They experience their own personality as valuable and capable of development and accomplishment, and it is important for them to keep their soul healthy. They are able to get over failures and dangerous situations by controlling their negative feelings and with a constructive behavior.

From description of these lifestyle characteristics one can find out the personality's attitude to changes, *their interpretation and the feelings which follow the changes*. When a situation recollected by the examined person manifests itself in a corrected repaired way, it can refer to a promising attitude of the personality to challenges and changes, and shows, that, being aware of his own value, he hopes to accomplish the tasks of life in an optimum way. He/she also expects that the crises can always be mastered.

D, Comparison of the coping potential dimensions of psychological immune system ON THE BASIS OF THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE MEMORIES OF THE PERSONALITY

To effectively straggle for once health demands the person's active behavior. So it is worth examining the level of psychological immune system of those who in

their memories prove active and disposing on the one hand and of those who have a passive and contemplative attitude on the other.

The person's activity, as the energetic component of lifestyle, shows the attitude of personality. Activity or passivity manifests itself in the roles which the person plays in his/her memories; these are active, bustling contemplating roles, or that of the victim, etc. Compensation with strength for example manifests itself in fantasies of grandeur and dominating, arbitrary actions and also in undervaluation of others. Compensation of weakness proves in behavior seeking protection and help, sometimes by appearance of the protecting mother.

The results of the comparisons show that those who were *active* in their memories – all but one – in all dimensions of psychological immune system reached a high level. They differed significantly ($p < 0,05$) by *nimbleness*, seeking *for challenge and persistency*. It seems that *activity* is in connection with an attitude which in the course of struggling regards the changes as challenges and possibilities of personal development; therefore the persons are *persistent* in surmounting obstacles and also conscious of their purposes.

E, Comparison of the coping potential dimensions of psychological immune system on the basis of the quality of MOTHER'S, BROTHER'S or SISTER'S role in the memories

The examined persons were differentiated by their memories of a *mother* and *brother* (or sister) with positive characteristics, such as helpful, kind, careful, tenderhearted, friendly co-operative etc., on the one hand, and negative features (impatient, careless, furious, derisive, envious etc.) Those who had negative memories of mother and brother/sister turned out to have a higher psychological immune system in most dimensions. Significant differences were found in respect of '*nimbleness, seeking for challenge, ingenuity and ability of collective monitoring.*' These persons readily accept the changes and regard them as challenges. They select the signals coming from others and are responsive to them, and their creative capacity makes it possible for them *that they can always make do*. Presumable when the mother doesn't satisfy the child's need for tenderness in a needed and sufficient way, this will, by way of compensation, heighten the intuitivism and reinforce the self-governing functions of the personality thus heightening the efficacy of psychological immune system.

Similar compensations can be brought about when sisters or brothers strive with each other and are unable to co-operate.

All this seem to support the individual psychological thesis which asserts that the personality himself creates his or her lifestyle by calling into being adaptive personal purposes and means. In this way can appear factors of surroundings with which the personality finds it difficult to co-operate, or factors which hinder the development of community feeling nevertheless the *compensation* helps the formation of effective struggling processes.

Summary

With our research we have been trying to prove the integrity of Adler's psychological conception, thus it become possible to identify and justify the appearance of the personal factors of psychological immune system in the memories of early childhood. These factors have been treated in the theory of cognitive psychical stress mastering.

The lifestyle as the manifestation of the opinions and attitudes of the personality becomes clear by the analysis of the memories of early childhood. Our research makes it possible in the course of therapy to heighten the psychological immune system which in stressful situations provides protection by creating a positive inner emotional background. According to the holistic notion, in this way, due to the influence of corrective emotional states of experiences the effectiveness of biological protection system can also be increased.

The different aspects which appear or even dominate in the memories of the personality, such as bravery, feeling of self-value, persistency, activity feeling of emotional relation, confidence, loneliness and solitary feeling, timidity and other similar emotions represent the lifestyle characteristics and their dynamism. The lifestyle characteristics are expressed by actions and their results, by various subjects and attitudes, by persons present and absent, by dispositions and effects caused by memories, and also by opinions about the life, the personality himself and other persons revived by the memories. Community feeling and social alienation are discernible by descriptions of „we“, or „I“ situations, by the manner of relation with some more persons appearing in the memories, whether these are members of the

family or friends, amicable or hostile, whether the personality maintains relations with them, or is isolated or alone. The compensation which originates either from strength or from weakness, gives evidence of personality's effort to attain a self-value feeling. ***In the course of analysis of the memories of early childhood the therapist can form a notion of the level of the different dimensions of psychological immune competency as well. The functions of psychological immune system manifest themselves in the contents of memories. The disposition of the memories and its alteration, the activity of the personality shown in the memories are in connection with the way of getting acquainted with environment, its understanding and control and also with the way of expectation of possible positive consequences; the quality of partnerships represented by the memories refers to how developed the ability of compensation tending to change the social environment is.***