

Adlerian Therapy as a Relational Constructivist Approach

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According to R. A. Neimeyer (2000) and Botella and Herrero (2000), an integrative bridge between cognitive constructivist and social constructionist approaches to therapy might be usefully labeled relational constructivism. This article affirms that Adlerian therapy—both explicitly and implicitly—is a relational constructivist approach, and consequently may serve as an integrative bridge between cognitive constructivist and social constructionist therapies. Both theory and practice issues are discussed.

Keywords: *Adlerian therapy; cognitive constructivist; social constructionist; relational constructivism; psychotherapy integration*

R. A. Neimeyer (2000) and Botella and Herrero (2000) suggest that an integrative bridge between cognitive constructivist and social constructionist approaches to therapy might be usefully labeled *relational constructivism*. It is interesting to note that Adlerian theory and therapy situates between cognitive constructivist and social constructionist perspectives.

For Adler, persons must be ultimately understood in social context; it is in relationships that humans have their meaning. . . . Psychological theories tend to be either individualistic or collectivistic—in the former community disappears; in the latter, the individual disappears. Adler's views, on the other hand, are a healthy balance of the individual rooted in relationships. (S. L. Jones & Butman, 1991, p. 237)

The Adlerian approach resonates with social constructionism regarding the sociocultural origins of human psychological development. In addition, the Adlerian perspective affirms cognitive constructivism's emphasis on the importance of humans as active agents creatively involved in the co-construction of their own psychology. Adlerian theory agrees with Martin and Sugarman's (1997) position that "although humans exist in a sociocultural world of persons, a distinguishing characteristic of personhood is the possession of an individual agentic consciousness" (p. 377). Some construc-

tive theorists and theories eschew individualism and declare the inescapability of being situated in some relational matrix. However, if there is no self-reflexive individual and situatedness is indeed inescapable, then it is a spurious notion to think that we can engage in what Gergen (1999) called the "emancipatory potential of discourse analysis, that is, inquiry which causes us to reflect critically and creatively on our own forms of life" (p. 80). The conviction expressed by social constructionists that all that is meaningful stems from relationship has no particular utility for the situation one happens to be in, because "the constraints of that situation will not be relaxed by that knowledge" (Stanley Fish, quoted in Korobov, 2000, p. 368). Thus, the value of a relational constructivist position such as Adlerian therapy: It accounts for both the social-embedded nature of human knowledge and the personal agency of creative and self-reflective individuals within relationships.

In agreement with Martin and Sugarman (1997), the Adlerian/relational constructivist perspective states that the individual arises from the social but is not the same as, nor reducible to, the social. Adlerian therapy is a holistic perspective, one that eschews viewing humans in a reductionistic manner. The Adlerian approach affirms that knowledge is socially embedded and relationally distributed but does not empty the self. It embraces a "both/and" position, accounting for and affirming that knowledge and experience is a coconstruction of self and others in a socially embedded matrix.

There is a growing body of literature demonstrating that Adlerian therapy resonates with both cognitive constructivist and social constructionist theories and approaches to therapy (e.g., Bitter, 1997; Carlson & Sperry, 1998; Disque & Bitter, 1998; Guidano & Liotti, 1983; Higgins, 2002; J. V. Jones, 1995; J. V. Jones & Lyddon, in press; Kelly, 1955; LaFountain, 1996; LaFountain & Garner, 1998; Mahoney, 1991, 2002; Maniacci, in press; Martin & Sugarman, 1997, 1999; Master, 1991; Mosak & Maniacci, 1999; Murphy, 1996; R. A. Neimeyer, in press; Peluso, White, & Kern, 2001;

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Schneider & Stone, 1998; Scott, Kelly, & Tolbert, 1995; Shulman & Watts, 1997; Watts, 2000; Watts & Carlson, 1999; Watts & Critelli, 1997; Watts & Pietrzak, 2000; Watts & Shulman, in press). The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that Adlerian therapy—both explicitly and implicitly—is correctly understood as a relational constructivist approach, one that may usefully serve as an integrative bridge between cognitive constructivist and social constructionist therapies. Both theory and practice issues are addressed in the discussion that follows.

ADLERIAN THERAPY AS A RELATIONAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH: THEORY

Philosophical/Theoretical Underpinnings

Adlerian and constructive therapies clearly share common philosophical/theoretical roots. The epistemological roots of Adlerian theory and constructivism are primarily found in the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant and the “as if” philosophy of Hans Vaihinger (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Ellenberger, 1970; J. V. Jones & Lyddon, in press; Shulman, 1985; Watts, 1999; Watts & Shulman, in press). In fact, Shulman (1985) states that Vaihinger was the key to Adler’s casting of his theory in constructive terms. Both Kant and Vaihinger emphasized the proactive, form-giving, and fictional character of human knowledge and its role in constructing the “realities” we know and to which we respond. Adlerian theory asserts that humans construct, manufacture, or narrativize ways of looking and experiencing the world and then take these fictions for truth (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Carlson & Sperry, 1998; Ellenberger, 1970; Master, 1991; Shulman & Watts, 1997; Watts, 1999; Watts & Shulman, in press).

Furthermore, Adler acknowledged the influence of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche on his theory (Ansbacher, 1983; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, 1979; Ellenberger, 1970; Watts & Shulman, in press). From Marx and Nietzsche, Adler gleaned ideas such as the socially embedded and fictional nature of human knowledge, the abilities and creativity of human beings, the necessity of egalitarian relationships and equal rights for all persons, and the socially useful and socially useless political and power issues involved in human relationships. Social constructionist therapies, via the writings of poststructural/postmodern theorists such as Derrida and Foucault, also have roots in the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche (Gergen, 1994, 1999; Hoyt, 1996, 1998; R. A. Neimeyer & Raskin, 2000; White & Epston, 1990). Consequently, many ideas Adler gleaned from Marx and Nietzsche are among the prevalent themes discussed in social constructionist therapies.

Human Agency

The proactive, creative view of humans discussed in the constructive literature sounds remarkably similar to Adler’s

various discussions of the “creative power of the self” or the “creative self.” The Adlerian view of the creative self, consistent with many constructive perspectives, is a psychology of use rather than a psychology of possession; that is, self is something one does or uses rather than something one is or possesses. Because of this creative power, humans function like actors coauthoring their own scripts, codirecting their own actions, and coconstructing their own personalities (Carlson & Sperry, 1998; Shulman & Watts, 1997; Watts, 1999; Watts & Shulman, in press). According to Carlson and Sperry (1998), the realization that individuals coconstruct the reality in which they live and are also able to “question, deconstruct, or reconstruct reality for themselves” is a fundamental tenet “not only of Adlerian psychotherapy but also of other constructivist psychotherapies” (p. 68).

Social Embeddedness

The constructive view of social embeddedness echoes the position taken by Adler (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, 1979) and subsequent Adlerians. Adlerian psychology is a relational psychology. Adler noted that humans are socially embedded and cannot be understood apart from their relational context. Mosak (1995) noted that the cardinal tenet of Adlerian psychology is social interest:

[Adler’s] placement of social interest at the pinnacle of his value theory is in the tradition of those religions that stress people’s responsibility for each other (p. 59). . . . If we regard ourselves as fellow human beings with fellow feeling, we are socially contributive people interested in the common welfare, and by Adler’s pragmatic definition of *normality*, mentally healthy. (p. 53)

Manaster and Corsini (1982) stated that the human personality or *style of life* “evolves from a biological being in a social context creating a sense of self in the world in which he (or she) acts” (p. 77). This social context of the child includes both the cultural values of the child’s culture of origin and his or her experiences within his or her “family constellation,” Adler’s phrase for the operative influences of the family structure, values, and dynamics (Shulman, 1985). Thus, “the child sees the world in general as paralleling his (or her) home environment and eventually the wider world on the basis of his (or her) initial perceptions” (Manaster & Corsini, 1982, p. 91).

The cardinal tenet of Adler’s theory, social interest, is obviously a social-contextual one.

The tendency of human beings to form attachments (social feelings) was considered by Adler to be a fact of life. The striving of the human is always in some way connected with human bonding. Social interest is the expression of this tendency in a way that promotes human welfare. Some aspects of social interest are innate as in the infant’s tendency to bond with its mother. However, social interest is a potential that must be developed through training in cooperation with productive endeavor. (Shulman, 1985, p. 248)

It is interesting to note that the development of the attachment motive in attachment theory appears to parallel the development of Adler's social interest. Both are innate, both have to be developed in interaction with primary caregivers, and the degree to which both are present in an individual's life impacts the degree to which that person moves toward or against/away from fellow human beings (Ainsworth, 1964; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1979; Bowlby, 1982; Forgas & Shulman, 1979; Mosak & Maniaci, 1999; Peluso, White, & Kern, 2001; Shulman & Watts, 1997; Watts & Shulman, in press).

Social Embeddedness and Human Knowing

As Disque and Bitter (1998) noted, we live "storied" lives:

As humans, we not only experience life directly through our senses, but we also transform it in an effort to make meaning out of what we experience. We live constantly with other human beings, and as such, we frame all that we do in the context of social relationships. The ordering of the meaning we experience in our lives with others most often takes the form of a story or narrative about who we are; who others are; what we are worth to ourselves, others, and the world; and what conclusions, convictions, and ethical codes will guide us. . . . Adler was one of the first to recognize this process in human development. He called the ordering of our experiences into a teleological narrative our lifestyle, our unique way of being, of coping, and of moving through (and approaching) the tasks of life. (p. 431)

What we know is influenced by the frames through which we view events. Everything we know depends on how we interpret and assign meanings (R. A. Neimeyer, 1995). Knowledge is derived from looking at the world from some perspective or the other and is in the service of some interests rather than others. "If I ask about the world, you can offer to tell me how it is under one or more frames of reference, but if I insist that you tell me how it is apart from all frames, what can you say?" (Nelson Goodman, quoted in Gergen, 2001, p. 11). It is important to note that social constructionists disdain the structural language used by cognitive constructivists, and the individualist implications thereof. They instead use literary metaphors like "narratives" or "stories." Regardless of the language or "root metaphors" used by constructivists or social constructionists, both are nevertheless addressing how humans construct or make meaning of their experiences.

Adlerian theory also holds a meaning-making perspective:

Human beings live in the realm of *meanings*. We do not experience things in the abstract; we always experience them in human terms. Even at its source our experience is qualified by our human perspective. . . . Anyone who tried to consider circumstances, to the exclusion of meanings, would be very unfortunate: he would isolate himself from others and his actions would be useless to himself or to anyone else; in a word, they would be meaningless. But no human being can escape meanings. We experience reality only through the

meaning we ascribe to it: not as a thing in itself, but as something interpreted. (Adler 1931/1992, p. 15)

The varied constructive descriptions of knowledge structures, such as "core ordering processes," "personal construct systems," "personal meaning organizations," "narratives," or "stories" are reminiscent of Adler's "style of life", the personal metanarrative for apprehending and responding to life (Watts, 1999; Watts & Shulman, in press). Shulman (1973) and Shulman and Mosak (1988) have described the functions of the style of life: It organizes and simplifies coping with the world by assigning rules and values; it selects, predicts, anticipates; its perceptions are guided by its own "private logic"; it selects what information it allows to enter, what it will attend to, what affects will be aroused and what its response will be. According to Shulman (1985), the style of life contains certain key elements. These include "a set of constructs about the self, the world, and the relationship between the two; a construct about what the relationship should be; an image of the ideal self; and a plan of action" (p. 246). All of these elements are attitudes, values, and meanings that the individual has creatively co-constructed within a relational context.

Narrative therapists Parry and Doan (1994) noted that neurobiological research indicates that one of the brain's primary functions is to create a "model" of the world, an internal blueprint or roadmap. This model is established early in life and becomes reality, serves as a guide for subsequent life experiences, and selectively attends to—through modification or rejection—only that incoming data that fits with its "program." The brain's function of creating an internal blueprint or roadmap is fundamentally similar to both constructive perspectives and the Adlerian idea of the relationally cocreated style of life.

ADLERIAN THERAPY AS A RELATIONAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH: PRACTICE

Whereas constructive approaches certainly have their differences, they share the following clinical-practical characteristics: They place strong emphasis on developing a respectful therapeutic relationship, they emphasize strengths and resources, and they are optimistic and future oriented (Hoyt, 1994). Hoyt's (1994) statement is equally descriptive of Adlerian therapy. In this section, I address five areas that further support the premise that Adlerian therapy is a relational constructivist approach: view of maladjustment, client reluctance to change, the client-therapist relationship, facilitating change, and multicultural considerations.

Perspective on Maladjustment

Constructive descriptions of motivation for therapy soundly resonate with Adlerian therapy. Both eschew the "medical model" perspective and embrace a nonpathological perspective. Both agree that clients are not sick (as in having a disease) and thus are not identified or labeled by their

diagnoses (de Shazer, 1991; Disque & Bitter, 1998; Hoyt, 1994, 1996, 1998; Littrell, 1998; Manaster & Corsini, 1982; Mosak, 1995; R. A. Neimeyer & Raskin, 2000; O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989; Parry & Doan, 1994; Schneider & Stone, 1998; Walter & Peller, 1992; Watts, 1999; Watts & Pietrzak, 2000; Watts & Shulman, in press; White & Epston, 1990). According to Parry and Doan (1994),

The experiences that bring individuals or families to therapy represent, in our view, a "wake up call"—a message that the stories that have formed them and shaped their emotional reactions have reached their limit. Although these stories made sense to children dependent upon adults, they are no longer adequate to help individuals handle present challenges effectively. It is now time for them to question the beliefs and assumptions that their stories have coded, in order to free themselves from the constraints upon capacities that maturity and responsibility have since made available to them. (p. 42)

Littrell (1998) stated that clients present for counseling because they are "demoralized" or "discouraged," not because they are sick and in need of a cure. Clients "lack hope. . . . One of our tasks as counselors is to assist in the process of restoring patterns of hope" (p. 63).

Adlerians agree that early existential decisions about self and the world—decisions made within and in relation to the first sociological environment, the family—form the core convictions of a client's style of life, his or her "Story of My Life" (Adler, 1931/1992, pp. 70-71). Adlerians agree that many of the early-formed convictions may have been useful for a child to belong and survive in his or her early environment but later prove to be no longer useful for productive living. In addition, a crucial goal of Adlerian therapy is to help clients challenge and modify or replace growth-inhibiting life themes with ones that are growth-enhancing. The ultimate goal is the development or enhancement of clients' social interest.

Because they do not see clients as sick, Adlerians are not about "curing" anything. Rather, in agreement with constructive approaches, therapy is "a process of encouragement" (Manaster & Corsini, 1982, p. 160). Dreikurs (1967) noted the essential necessity of encouragement in counseling. He stated that presenting problems are "based on discouragement" and without "encouragement, without having faith in himself restored, [the client] cannot see the possibility of doing or functioning better" (p. 62). Adler once asked a client what he thought made the difference in his successful experience in therapy. The client replied, "That's quite simple. I had lost all courage to live. In our consultations I found it again" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 342).

Whereas Adlerians view clients as discouraged rather than sick, they thus view client symptoms from a proactive rather than merely reactive perspective. According to Mosak and Maniaci (1999), symptoms are selected and chosen because they are perceived as facilitating movement toward a desired

goal. In other words, symptoms are not merely reactions to situations but rather attempted solutions.

Client Reluctance to Change

According to Mahoney, Miller, and Arciero (1995), constructivists believe that the core ordering processes of human beings are less accessible and amenable to change. Furthermore, when these core ordering processes are challenged or threatened in therapy, clients will manifest self-protective mechanisms to preserve the integrity of their core meaning system (G. J. Neimeyer, 1995). According to Liotti, "A cognitive structure that attributes meaning and causal relationships to an important class of emotional experiences will be quite resistant to change if the individual does not develop alternative meaning structures" (quoted in G. J. Neimeyer, 1995, p. 116). G. J. Neimeyer (1995) commented that this self-protective view is common to many constructive approaches.

Adlerians also espouse a "self-protective" view of client reluctance to change. According to Shulman (1985), the core convictions of a person's style of life are essentially unconscious and are less accessible and amenable to change. When these core style of life convictions are challenged (in life or in therapy), the client often responds by use of "compensation." According to Mosak (1995), the word *compensation* was used by Adler as an umbrella to cover all the problem-solving devices the client uses to "safeguard" his or her self-esteem, reputation, and physical self. As in the constructivist perspective, Adlerians view client reluctance to change in terms of the client's "self-protecting" or safeguarding his or her sense of self (Shulman, 1985).

Adlerian and constructive therapies also view client reluctance to change in terms of goal misalignment. According to Dreikurs (1967),

Therapeutic cooperation requires an alignment of goals. . . . What appears as "resistance" constitutes a discrepancy between the goals of the therapist and those of the [client]. In each case, the proper relationship has to be reestablished, differences solved, and agreement reached. (p. 7)

Both Adlerian and constructive therapies agree that when there is disagreement between clients and therapists regarding therapeutic goals, clients will be reluctant to engage in the therapeutic process (Dreikurs, 1967; O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989).

Client-Therapist Relationship

Of the many areas of common ground shared between Adlerian theory and constructive approaches, the view of the therapeutic relationship may well be the most similar. Both Adlerian and constructive therapies describe the client-counselor relationship using words such as "cooperative," "collaborative," "egalitarian," "mutual," "optimistic," "respectful,"

and “shared” (Watts & Pietrzak, 2000). In developing the relationship, constructive therapists focus on developing a strong therapeutic alliance, trusting the client, and exploring clients’ competencies. Most of the basic skills used in building this relationship are not unique to either approach. According to Littrell (1998), “Strategies and techniques are ineffectual if the facilitative conditions of warmth, genuineness, and empathy do not permeate the counseling process” (p. 8).

For Adlerians, a strong counselor-client relationship is usually developed when counselors model social interest. Watts (1998) noted that Adler’s descriptions of therapist-modeled social interest look very similar to Rogers’s descriptions of the core facilitative conditions of client change: congruence, empathic understanding, and unconditional positive regard. Furthermore, Mosak (1979) discussed the counselor-client relationship in terms of “faith, hope, and love” (p. 63); that is, expressing faith in clients and helping them develop faith in themselves, engendering hope in clients, and helping clients experience a relationship with an individual who truly cares. The basic skills necessary to build the therapeutic alliance discussed in the Adlerian literature are essentially the same ones mentioned in constructive therapy literature (Watts & Pietrzak, 2000; Watts & Shulman, in press).

Adlerian therapy typically is viewed as consisting of four phases (Mosak, 1979, 1995). The first and, for most Adlerians, most important phase is titled *relationship*. The Adlerian approach is a relational psychology and a relational psychotherapy. Because psychotherapy occurs in a relational context, Adlerian therapists focus on developing a respectful, collaborative, and egalitarian therapeutic alliance with clients. Therapeutic efficacy in other phases of Adlerian therapy—analysis, insight, and reorientation—is predicated on the development and continuation of a strong therapeutic relationship (Mosak, 1979, 1995; Watts, 1998, 1999, 2000; Watts & Pietrzak, 2000; Watts & Shulman, in press).

Facilitating Change

Constructive therapists seek to help clients change their behaviors and attitudes from a problem/failure focus to a focus on solutions/successes and discover and develop latent assets, resources, and strengths that may have been overlooked as clients have focused primarily on problems and limitations (Hoyt, 1998; Littrell, 1998; R. A. Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995; O’Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989; Rosen & Kuehlwein, 1996; Watts, 1999; Watts & Pietrzak, 2000).

As counselors, we help clients find and/or create patterns of thoughts, feelings, actions, and meaning. We code these

In both theory and practice the Adlerian approach clearly resonates with both cognitive constructivist and social constructionist approaches...

patterns with names such as “resources” or “abilities” or “inner strengths.” Some patterns we rediscover from clients’ pasts; some are currently being used but clients have not yet recognized them as such. We can also co-create new patterns that do not yet exist in clients’ repertoire or we can modify current ones. (Littrell, 1998, pp. 63-64)

The similarity between Adlerian and constructive therapies is remarkable. As noted earlier, Hoyt (1994) identified three clinical-practical characteristics that constructive approaches share: They place strong emphasis on developing a respectful therapeutic relationship, they emphasize strengths and resources, and they are optimistic and future-oriented. These characteristics mirror what Adlerians

have historically called *encouragement*, or the therapeutic modeling of social interest (Watts, 1999; Watts & Pietrzak, 2000). For Adlerians, encouragement is both an attitude and a way of being with clients in therapy. According to Watts and Pietrzak (2000), Adler and subsequent Adlerians consider encouragement a crucial aspect of human growth and development. This is especially true in the field of counseling. Stressing the importance of encouragement in therapy, Adler stated: “Altogether, in every step of the treatment, we must not deviate from the path of encouragement” (quoted in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 342). Dreikurs (1967) agreed: “What is most important in every treatment is encouragement” (p. 35). In addition, Dreikurs stated that therapeutic success was largely dependent on “[the therapist’s] ability to provide encouragement,” and failure generally occurred “due to the inability of the therapist to encourage” (pp. 12-13).

Encouragement focuses on helping counselees become aware of their worth. By encouraging them, you help your counselees recognize their own strengths and assets, so they become aware of the power they have to make decisions and choices. . . . Encouragement focuses on beliefs and self-perceptions. It searches intensely for assets and processes feedback so the client will become aware of her (or his) strengths. In a mistake-centered culture like ours, this approach violates norms by ignoring deficits and stressing assets. The counselor is concerned with changing the client’s negative self concept and anticipations. (Dinkmeyer, Dinkmeyer, & Sperry, 1987, p. 124)

In agreement with constructive approaches, Adlerians are “technical eclectics” (Manaster & Corsini, 1982). The interventions specific to constructive therapies are either similar to or congruent with ones commonly used in Adlerian therapy. Thus, as part of the encouragement process, Adlerians use a variety of procedures to demonstrate concern for clients through active listening and empathy; communicate respect

for and confidence in clients; help clients uncover the hidden texts in their life story (style of life); identify and combat oppressive and discouraging beliefs or “scripts”; create new patterns of behavior; develop more encouraging perceptions; focus on efforts, not merely outcomes; and focus on assets, resources, and strengths. The assumptions, characteristics, and methods of encouragement help to create an optimistic, empowering, and growth-enhancing environment for clients—a place where they feel enabled rather than disabled (Adler, 1929; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Carlson & Slavik, 1997; Dinkmeyer, 1972; Dinkmeyer et al., 1987; Dinkmeyer & Losoncy, 1980; Dreikurs, 1967; Mosak, 1979, 1995; Mosak & Maniaci, 1998; Neuer, 1936; Sweeney, 1998; Watts, 1999; Watts & Pietrzak, 2000; Watts & Shulman, in press).

Multicultural Considerations

With the increasing emphasis on multiculturalism, many counselors have been drawn to constructive approaches because of their focus on the social embeddedness of humans and, consequently, human knowledge. Adlerians and Adlerian theory addressed social equality issues and emphasized the social embeddedness of humans and human knowledge long before multiculturalism became a focal issue in the helping professions. Adler campaigned for the social equality of women, contributed much to the understanding of gender issues, spoke against the marginalization of minority groups, and specifically predicted the Black power and women’s liberation movements. In addition, Adlerian theory played an influential positive role in the outcome of the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of May 17, 1954 (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1978; Dreikurs, 1971; Hoffman, 1994; LaFountain & Mustaine, 1998; Mozdierz, 1998; Watts, 1999; Watts & Pietrzak, 2000; Watts & Shulman, in press).

The Adlerian approach is clearly relevant for working with culturally diverse populations in contemporary society. According to Gerald Corey, the Adlerian approach is “certainly compatible with many of the macrostrategies for future delivery of service to culturally diverse populations” (quoted in Sweeney, 1998, pp. 33-34). Arciniega and Newlon (1999) noted that the characteristics and assumptions of Adlerian psychology are congruent with the cultural values of many minority racial and ethnic groups and affirmed that the Adlerian therapeutic process is respectful of cultural diversity. Adlerian therapy goals are not aimed at deciding for clients what they should change about themselves.

Rather, the practitioner works in collaboration with clients and their family networks. This theory offers a pragmatic approach that is flexible and uses a range of action-oriented techniques to explore personal problems within their sociocultural context. It has the flexibility to deal both with the individual and the family, making it appropriate for racial and ethnic groups. (p. 451)

Multiculturalism also includes attention to and appreciation of the role of religion and/or spirituality in the lives of clients. The field of counseling and psychotherapy has made a 180-degree turn, from a position of disdain and avoidance, to one beginning to appreciate the influence of spiritual issues on cognition, emotion, and, ultimately, behavior (Propst, 1996). According to Mahoney (1995), “Issues of value—good-bad, right-wrong, and sacred-profane” will become increasingly central in the future of psychotherapy, “with the dimensions of religiosity and spirituality taking on new meanings in psychological assessment” (p. 55).

A key value central to many clients is their personal spirituality. Without understanding their clients’ spiritual perspective, therapists are “operating with a vital value system and possibly even a member of the family, God, left at home and ignored” (Grizzle, 1992, p. 139). Spirituality is a vital area for therapists to understand because clients’ spiritual beliefs typically provide the value system by which they view themselves, others, and the world.

Historically, most systems of psychology have had either a neutral or negative position toward religion and spirituality. Adlerian therapy, however, has been quite open to addressing religious and spiritual issues. The topic is addressed somewhat regularly by authors in the *Journal of Individual Psychology* (e.g., Mansager, 2000).

According to Manaster and Corsini (1982), “The most common Adlerian position toward religion is positive, viewing God as the concept of perfection. . . . For Adler, religion was a manifestation of social interest” (p. 63). Mosak (1995) noted that “Adler’s psychology has a religious tone. His placement of social interest at the pinnacle of his value theory is in the tradition of those religions that stress people’s responsibility for each other” (p. 59). Mosak (1995) mentioned that when Adler introduced the concepts of *value* and *meaning* into psychology via his 1931 book *What Life Should Mean to You*, the concepts were unpopular at the time. The cardinal tenet of Adlerian theory is social interest, and Adler equated it with the mandate to “love one’s neighbor as oneself” and the golden rule. Furthermore, Mosak (1995) identified spirituality as one of the five major tasks of life:

Although Adler alluded to the *spiritual*, he never specifically named it. But each of us must deal with the problems of defining the nature of the universe, the existence and nature of God, and how to relate to these concepts. (p. 54)

Consistent with important multicultural emphases, Adlerian therapy is a *positive psychology* and approach to therapy that emphasizes prevention, optimism and hope, resilience and growth, competence, creativity and resourcefulness, social consciousness, and finding meaning and a sense of community in relationships. Furthermore, Adlerian therapy evinced these and additional positive psychology characteristics long before the emergence of the so-called positive psychology movement.

CONCLUSION

According to R. A. Neimeyer (2000) and Botella and Herrero (2000), an integrative bridge between cognitive constructivist and social constructionist perspectives might be usefully labeled “relational constructivism.” As noted throughout this article, the Adlerian theory and system is a relational and constructive psychology and psychotherapy. Adlerian therapy affirms that humans cannot be understood apart from their social context and the relationships therein; “it is in relationships that humans have their meaning” (Jones & Butman, 1991, p. 237). Adlerian therapy inclusively affirms both the collectivistic and individualistic aspects of human functioning. The Adlerian view of humankind is “a healthy balance of the individual rooted in relationships” (Jones & Butman, 1991, p. 237). In both theory and practice, the Adlerian approach clearly resonates with both cognitive constructivist and social constructionist approaches and can therefore be correctly identified as a relational constructivist approach.

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