

MOTIVATION MODIFICATION: AN ADLERIAN APPROACH

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The Adlerian counselor is not preoccupied with changing behavior; rather he is concerned with understanding the individual's subjective frame of reference and the identification of the individual's mistaken notion or goal within that framework. Indeed, the behavior of an individual is only understood when the goals are identified for "they are the psychic stimuli that motivate the individual's action" (Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 1963). Investigation of the behavior is, of course, essential in providing clues toward uncovering the individual's mistaken notions about himself. Failure to recognize the clues can result in an adverse effect: reinforcing--or encouraging--the mistaken notions. A child who was not getting his school work completed is an excellent example:

Tom was hopelessly behind at school. The teacher suggested to his parents that extra help was necessary if Tom was to progress. He was subsequently enrolled in a remedial program, and a tutor was employed. Tom became very cooperative, and his parents received positive reports regarding his ability to achieve. Unfortunately, his work at school did not materially improve.

An investigation of Tom's behavior revealed a "discovery" that he had made early in life: if he played helpless, someone would help him. This notion was easily obtained since Tom had three older sisters to augment his mother's helpfulness. He applied the same approach in school and over the years had conned every teacher into becoming a helper. The sixth grade teacher, however, was not as easily maneuvered, and Tom fell behind. The father inadvertently pinpointed the issue when he said, "His teacher is not like the one last year. She did so much for him." The good intentions of all involved were, in fact, encouraging the very deficiency they were attempting to remedy. With all of Tom's special help, there was no reason or purpose in improving his performance in a regular classroom.

The psychologically illiterate adult who observes only behavior and neglects to understand the purpose behind that behavior will fail to grasp what is happening. Any behavior change which is reported may just be that--a change. Undoubtedly, there will be an attempt to change a behavior which is unacceptable to a particular individual or society to a behavior which is acceptable; evidence of acceptable behaviors, however, does not insure psychological progress in the daily life of the individual.

Mr. Haskins, the principal, delighted in proving the elementary school counselor--who was "soft on kids"--wrong. His favorite story was that of Butch. Butch was in the third grade, and he had an

almost perfect record: he would seldom finish his work without being prodded constantly by the teacher, kept in at recess, kept in after school, or enlisting the help of his mother with homework.

The teacher finally appealed to the principal. Mr. Haskins called Butch to his office and informed him that "if he didn't finish his work tomorrow, he would be given a spanking." You can probably guess what happened. Butch was given a sound spanking the next day and sent back to his room in tears and with a red bottom.

"Butch has never failed to complete his work since that day," the principal would proudly announce.

This is rather convincing evidence that the principal was successful in changing the behavior with his methods. Upon investigating further, however, it was learned that Butch would bring his completed work each day for the principal to examine. Mr. Haskins would take time to talk with him, to comment on the tasks involved, and to praise the achievement. (Reinforcement techniques used by behavior modifiers probably accounts for more of the resulting behavior change than the spanking.) Butch's behavior has changed useless and unacceptable to useless and acceptable. It is only more acceptable to those involved in a school society. Butch's mistaken notion, his motivation--that he must keep everyone busy with him or he will not have a place among his fellowmen--still persists and is even encouraged.

The story of Butch and Mr. Haskins illustrates the primary difficulty with the continual use of behavior modification practices. Ignoring the initial spanking, Mr. Haskins' time and use of praise is an acceptable social reinforcement (for behavior modifiers), and it leads to the behaviors desired by the principal. Unfortunately, the techniques deal only with behavior and not motivation. Since the selection of a reinforcer is individualized to the person, the behavior modifier is often in the position of responding in a manner desired by the individual; and all individuals (including Butch) find those responses which "fit" their mistaken notions or goals reinforcing. The great concern, therefore, is the daily encouragement of mistaken motivations with good intentions but nevertheless misguided actions on the part of adults. Useful behaviors are stimulated and motivated from within rather than from without so that the individual does what needs to be done without having personal elevation uppermost in his mind.

Behavior modification practices are not the only means of stimulation currently employed in American homes and schools. The efforts of well-meaning parents and teachers are often thwarted by forces that fail to encourage useful behaviors as defined above. Forces such as external monitoring, exhorting, coaxing, and supervising are still all too prevalent. A simple illustration is the morning scene of a mother and her children:

Sally, a mother of five, calls her children several times to wake them. She makes many trips to see that they get dressed, coaxes them to eat their breakfast, and checks to make sure they are dressed properly. She then makes certain they have their school books, and she walks them to the bus.

Sally is under the impression that she is giving to her children when she is really taking from them. She knew the "right" way to be a mother and as a consequence indulged all her children. At the Family Education Center* Sally was educated with respect to the standard operating procedures for guiding her children to become self-sufficient and able to manage their own affairs. If she had continued with her program, she would have rendered the children "averse to and comparatively incompetent in situations which require effort and perseverance in overcoming obstacles" (Dewey, 1939).

Overcoming obstacles and developing the ability to use sound judgment stem from having acquired a repertoire of experiences upon which to base the judgments which are required in solving problems. The experiences to be acquired must increase in number, diversity, and complexity to parallel the physical growth pattern (Figure 1, Line A). These are experiences that arouse "curiosity, strengthen initiative, and set up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future. . ." (Dewey, 1939). The fortunate individual who has such an environment will find little or no gap between the problems or obstacles which confront him and the knowledge or skills which he has acquired from experience.

Adlerians will note as did Dewey that experiences which serve the individual with augmented resources are just more available in a democratic atmosphere. Quality experiences in a democracy include an origin in self-determination, an opening to further experiencing, an ability to learn from consequences (as opposed to external authority), and the employment of one's knowledge and skills in a multitude of social settings. In addition, the nature of a democracy is to provide a greater number of quality experiences to a greater number of people. "In contrast, the autocratic and chaotic forms of social life are reductive in nature, leaving fewer individuals fewer modes of experiencing" (Bitter, 1975).

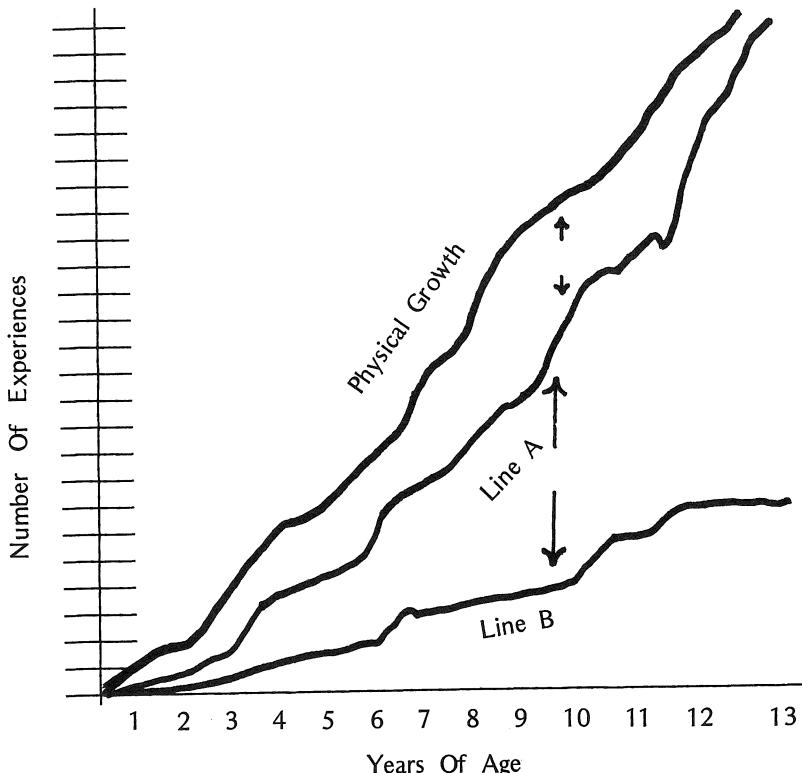
The potential and value of experience as a tool for motivation formation can be illustrated with a description of the allowance systems of two families:

The Hendersons gave a weekly allowance to each of their children—provided that specified tasks around the house were completed. The number of tasks and the amount of responsibility assigned to each child was proportionate to his age. The individual amounts were determined by the parents who estimated how much the respective ages should have to spend as they pleased. The parents paid for all clothing, school supplies, music lessons, and medical expenses.

The Pattersons, on the other hand, gave an allowance to each of their children irrespective of whether their specified tasks around the house were completed. The individual amounts were determined by the parents and each child by adding the expected expenses for clothing, school supplies, and recreation per month. Payment was made initially by the week and later by the month as the child became comfortable with handling larger sums of money. The nature and quantity of expenses was readjusted as needed according

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FIGURE 1



Line A indicates that the number of varied experiences are paralleling an individual's physical growth, and that the gap between age and experience is minimal.

Line B indicates that the number of varied experiences have been diminished as the individual grows, and the gap between age and experience is immense.

to the demands of the child's situation. The parents paid for medical expenses and music lessons; these expenses were included in the post high school era. When the family members were ready for college, they needed to take on the responsibility for housing and food, tuition and fees, books, travel, etc. The allowance was comparable to the responsibility.

The Hendersons, a Line B family, kept the majority of experiences in the hands of the adults. Decisions about the allowance (amount and payment schedule) were totally made by the parents, and the children were mere recipients in the process. Further, decisions about each child's responsibility in the home (and at school) were made by the parents as well. The multitude of experiences denied the children by this process will be easily seen when we

provide an assessment of the results in the Patterson family. The most diminishing experiences, however, were happening in the Henderson family: when the children found that by saving they could accumulate large sums, they chose to go on a "sit-down" strike around the home. The assigned tasks were initially completed in a less than adequate manner which led to threats from the parents to cut off the allowance. Eventually, the children stopped doing the tasks altogether except for occasional spurts when they were running low on money. No amount of coaxing or coercing ever got the children to end the strike.

During the period of physical growth in the Patterson family, ages 4 to 17, the children administered an ever-increasing budget, and the opportunity for learning through experience followed. For example, a set of stick dolls caught the eye of one of the children; she badgered the father to buy the dolls for her, but he held firm, saying, "You will have your allowance on Monday, and after three Mondays you will have enough to purchase the dolls." After three weeks, the child rushed to the store with her savings in fear that the purchase she had set her heart on would have been sold. The dolls were still there, and she bought them. A few days later the dolls had been put aside, and the father inquired about it. "It didn't turn out the way I thought it would" was the answer. It was a valuable lesson, and it only cost \$2.15. Many an adult having missed appropriate experiences in childhood on which to make adequate judgments has paid a far greater price than that for something that "didn't turn out the way I thought it would."

Later there was the experience of purchasing a gawdy pair of shoes which were quickly more out of shape than a conventional pair. They had to be worn to work anyway since there was not enough money to buy another pair for two months. Then came the wonderful discovery of a fire sale with 50% to 60% savings on an entire winter wardrobe. Savings such as this augmented by an income from baby sitting and mowing lawns could provide additional money if put in a bank. A visit with the bank's Vice-President convinced one of the more ambitious children that compound interest was the way of the future. An insurance representative was also convincing; to him, the future was not all compound interest, but rather cash value, surrender value, and protection as well. Each experience projected itself into further experiences, giving the individuals involved an opportunity to handle the realities of life at an early age. The parents offered guidance to their children, but the ultimate decision of how and when the money would be spent was left to each child. The children made mistakes, of course, but they learned quickly, early in life, and from the consequences of their experiences as opposed to external authority. By the time they had reached their full growth, they were well equipped with a repertoire of experiences from which to make sound judgements. The Line A development of the Patterson children had reaped the available benefits.

In contrast, the Line B development used in many families leaves the children lacking. The curtailing of experiences by fearful or indulgent parents will logically deprive the individual of needed capabilities; and the gap between the inevitable obstacles encountered with physical and psychological growth and an ability to handle problems becomes increasingly greater. Acquiring a repertoire of meaningful experiences is just not that easy for children surrounded

by adults who keep telling them "to do it the right way." The use of past experiences as a means of guiding the child's acquisition of skills and knowledge is complicated. As Dewey (1939) indicates, adults must "exercise the wisdom his own wider experiences give him without imposing a merely external control." Children who lack experience--who have their potential experiences controlled by adults--have a diminished possibility of exercising sound judgment when dealing with social, educational, and mental problems. It is not uncommon for these children to seek a dubious security in countless mistaken notions and mistaken goals.

Dreikurs (1950) established the four stages of counseling to be the formation of a relationship, the psychological investigation, insight through psychological disclosure, and reorientation or re-education. Motivation Modification involves these same stages. Adlerian counselors will find the clues offered in behavior to be essential to a psychological investigation. Indeed, behavior is only a pitfall when it is treated as an end in itself instead of the outward manifestation of one's inner motivations. The reorientation of individuals with mistaken notions through the use of encouragement is certainly the only route to the modification of motivation. The procedures of Motivation development are the same in corrective (or modification) situations as they are in formative situations: that is, parents, teachers, adults in general must learn to "never do anything for the child that he can do for himself" (Dreikurs and Soltz, 1964). Further, we will prepare and motivate our children best by providing for them the experiences of life in an orderly and progressive manner. An individual who learns to meet and face the obstacles and problems of childhood will never be found lacking as an adult.

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