

Adler and Shakespeare – Life Coach, Visionary, Leader

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[Go directly to the text of the paper](#)

Abstract

Alfred Adler cited Shakespeare as having contributed significantly to the insights of Individual Psychology, which the Viennese psychiatrist founded in the early twentieth century. Shakespearean scholar Harold Bloom considered personality to be a Shakespearean creation and an originality of the bard. Bloom saw Shakespeare as “our (humanity’s) psychologist,” as opposed to those who saw and still see Freud in that role. This article provides evidence that it is Adler who deserves the modern title, since it is Adler’s subjective, social, and creative psychology of use that resonates with Shakespeare’s characters and purpose, namely the understanding of human nature by every human being. Adlerian counselors make an explicit “style of life” assessment with clients to help them better understand themselves and their fictive goals. As Shakespeare’s plays are available in modern English, students and clients in classes or groups may follow Shakespeare’s “assume a virtue if you have it not” in *Hamlet*, as well as Adler’s “act as if,” so that they are already the individuals they would like to become. Emphasis on the pretend nature of the action will help to reduce any perceived area of risk; while “putting on” Shakespeare will add credibility, be potentially transformative, and advance Shakespeare and Adler’s cause.

Shakespeare vu par Alfred Adler : Coach de vie, Visionnaire, Leader

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Résumé

Selon Alfred Adler (1870-1937), Shakespeare a contribué de manière significative aux idées de la *psychologie individuelle* - discipline que ce psychiatre viennois fonda au début du XX^e siècle. Harold Bloom, un spécialiste de Shakespeare, affirmait que la personnalité est une création originale du Barde de Stratford. Il déclarait que Shakespeare est « notre psychologue » (de l’humanité, entendait-il), en opposition à ceux qui attribuent ce rôle à Freud. Cet article fournit la preuve que c’est Adler qui mérite ce titre moderne, du moment que c’est la psychologie subjective, sociale et créative d’Adler qui est en unisson avec les personnages et le dessein de Shakespeare, à savoir la compréhension de la nature humaine par tout un chacun.

Les conseillers adleriens font une évaluation explicite du « style de vie » de leurs clients afin de les aider à mieux se comprendre eux-mêmes et leurs objectifs fictifs. Les pièces de Shakespeare étant disponibles en anglais contemporain, les étudiants et les clients de ces classes ou groupes peuvent donc suivre cette citation, tirée de l’Hamlet « affectez la vertu si vous ne l’avez pas », tout comme l’ “agir comme si” d’Adler, afin qu’ils soient déjà les individus qu’ils aimeraient devenir. Mettre l’accent sur la prétendue nature de l’action aidera à réduire tout domaine de perception de risque ; tandis que « endosser » Shakespeare y ajoutera de la crédibilité, afin d’être

potentiellement transformateur, et faire en même temps avancer la cause conjointe de Shakespeare et d'Adler.

Adler y Shakespeare - Entrenador Vital, Visionario, Líder

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Resumen

Alfred Adler citó a Shakespeare como una contribución significativa a las ideas de la Psicología Individual, la cual el psiquiatra Vienés fundó a principios del siglo XX. El erudito de Shakespeare, Harold Bloom, consideraba que la personalidad era una creación de Shakespeare y una originalidad del poeta. Bloom vio a Shakespeare como "nuestro psicólogo (de la humanidad)", a diferencia de aquellos que vieron y aún ven a Freud en ese papel. Este artículo proporciona evidencia de que es Adler quien merece el título moderno, ya que es la psicología de uso subjetiva, social y creativa de Adler la que resuena con los personajes y el propósito de Shakespeare, es decir la comprensión de la naturaleza humana por parte de cada ser humano. Los consejeros de Adlerian hacen una evaluación explícita del "estilo de vida" con los clientes para ayudarlos a comprenderse mejor a sí mismos y sus objetivos ficticios. Como las obras de Shakespeare están disponibles en Inglés moderno, los estudiantes y clientes en clases o grupos pueden seguir el ejemplo de Shakespeare "asume una virtud si no la tienes" en Hamlet, así como Adler "actuar como si", de modo que ya son las personas que les gustaría ser. El énfasis en la naturaleza simulada de la acción ayudará a reducir cualquier área de riesgo percibida; mientras que "ponerse" Shakespeare agregará credibilidad, será potencialmente transformador y promoverá la causa de Shakespeare y Adler.

Adler e Shakespeare - Life Coach, Visionário, Líder

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Sumário

Alfred Adler citou Shakespeare como tendo contribuído significativamente para as idéias da Psicologia Individual, a qual foi fundada pelo psiquiatra vienense no início do século XX. Harold Bloom, um acadêmico Shakespeariano, considerava que a personalidade era uma criação Shakespeariana e uma originalidade deste bardo. Bloom viu Shakespeare como "nosso psicólogo (da humanidade)", em oposição àqueles que consideravam - e ainda consideram - Freud nesse papel de "nosso psicólogo". Este artigo fornece evidências de que é Adler quem merece este título nos dias de hoje, pois é a psicologia subjetiva, social e criativa de Adler que ressoa com os personagens e o objetivo de Shakespeare, a saber, a compreensão da natureza humana, por cada ser humano. Os conselheiros Adlerianos fazem uma avaliação explícita do "estilo de vida" com os clientes, para ajudá-los a entender melhor a si mesmos e seus objetivos fictícios. Como as peças de Shakespeare estão disponíveis em inglês moderno, estudantes e clientes em aulas ou grupos podem seguir o conceito de Shakespeare de "deve-se assumir uma virtude quando não se possui", em Hamlet, bem como o "agir como se" de Adler, para que eles já sejam os indivíduos que eles gostariam de se tornar. A ênfase na natureza assumida deste tipo de ação ajudará

a reduzir qualquer percepção de riscos; ao mesmo tempo que "vestir" Shakespeare agregará credibilidade, será potencialmente transformador, e promoverá a causa de ambos Shakespeare e Adler.

Adler und Shakespeare – Lebenscoach, Visionär, Führer

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Zusammenfassung

Gemäß Alfred Adler hat Shakespeare einen wichtigen Beitrag zum Verständnis der Individualpsychologie, die der Wiener Psychiater Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts gegründet hat, geliefert. Für Harold Bloom, ein Schüler von Shakespeare, ist die Persönlichkeit eine Schöpfung und ein originelles Element in der Dichtkunst von Shakespeare. Bloom sah Shakespeare als „unser Psycholog (bzw. der Menschheit), in Gegensatz zu denjenigen, die Freud in dieser Rolle sahen und immer noch sehen.

Diese Abhandlung erbringt den Nachweis, dass Adler den modernen Titel verdient, denn seine subjektive, soziale und kreative praktische Psychologie steht in Resonanz mit den Charakteren und dem Anliegen von Shakespeare, n. das Verstehen der menschlichen Natur für alle zugänglich zu machen. Die Psychologen der Adler Schule behandelten ihre Klienten mit einem detaillierten „Lebensstil „ Befragung. Dies erlaube die Klienten sich selbst sowie seine Ziele besser zu verstehen.

Da die Werke von Shakespeare im modernen Englisch erhältlich sind, können Studenten und auch Klienten sowohl den „nimmt eine Tugend an wenn du ihn nicht besitzt“ von Shakespeare in Hamlet, als auch Adler's „tue als ob“, annehmen und so bereits die von ihnen gewünschten Individualitäten verkörpern. Das hervorheben der vorgetäuschten Natur dieser Aktion ist eine Hilfe zur Begrenzung aller erkannten Risiken. „Der Verweis“ nach Shakespeare soll die Glaubwürdigkeit erhöhen, potentiell Transformativ sein und das Anliegen von Shakespeare und Adler fördern.

Introduction

Alfred Adler (1870 - 1937) was the first therapist of the modern era to apply group intervention methods in school-based community child-guidance centers in front of parents and teachers from Viennese schools. This developed into open forum family education centers in Vienna and beyond (Sonstegard, 1998, 217; Eriksson, 2019, 1). Just as the striving from a minus to a perceived plus situation – towards overcoming, success, superiority, or perfection – is the master motive in Adlerian psychology, so *social interest/community feeling* is the cardinal personality trait, with traits regarded as reflecting “the relationship of an individual to his environment.” The degree of social interest is Adler's criterion for mental health and the barometer of the child's normality (Ansbacher, 1968, 131). Adlerian therapy is holistic and a psychology of use, and so requires therapists to understand individuals in all their activities: family, workplace, culture, and society. Adler sees human beings who create goals, both immediate and long-term, and which motivate both behavior and development. Behavior is thus understood at three levels: how the individual is behaving; what purpose the behavior serves for the individual and the goal

intended; and thirdly, the motivational or cognitive “why” which is at the root of the behavior in question, and where interventions must focus (Adler, 1979, 52; Nicoll, 2015, 32). Adler’s psychology was originally called a depth psychology since he was associated with Freud and Jung. However, Adler rejected this, seeing the unconscious as merely that part of an individual’s approach to life which is not understood, and which can be remedied by viewing all processes in the larger context. Adler’s Individual Psychology can be better described as “context” psychology (Adler, 1964, 3).

In Adler’s opinion, psychology has for its proper goal the understanding of human nature by every human being (Bottome, 1957, 255). Shakespeare’s psychology has been described in a similar way: “Shakespeare was not sectarian, he pleaded nobody’s mission, he stated nobody’s cause, having written with a view to be a mirror of things as they are.” (Dawson, Cockbill, 1878). Shaheen, (2009) a modern American Shakespearean scholar and author, echoes this concept: “Shakespeare touches every shore of human experience.”

The modern American scholar Howard Bloom stated that universality is the authentic aspect of only a handful of western writers and that Shakespeare is unequivocally at the top. He was forthright in saying that Shakespeare is the Western Canon of Literature (Bloom, 1994, 70). George Dawson, a nineteenth century non-conformist preacher and Shakespearean lecturer, amplifies this idea:

“The fact is, Shakespeare was not sectarian, he pleaded nobody’s mission, he stated nobody’s cause. He has written with a view to be a mirror of things as they are; and shows the office of the true poet and literary man, which is to re-create the soul of man as God has created it, and human society as man has made” (Dawson, Cockbill, 1878).

Bloom sees Shakespeare as “our psychologist,” and not Freud, and sees the modern concept of personality as a Shakespearean invention (Bloom, 1998). This article provides evidence that it is Adler’s individual and subjective psychology with its emphasis on taking an interest in the interests of others, and cultivating a feeling of community that resonates with Shakespeare’s characters and the bard’s depiction of human nature as it is with all its human foibles. Adlerian therapists work to clarify these foibles by making a personal assessment of each individual client’s “style of life” along with their fictive goals. Early on in his career Adler believed that human movement was not determined by the factual data, but rather by the way in which the individual cognitively interpreted it. Understandably, the brotherhood of humankind has been described by Jahn as Adler’s primary overriding belief (Adler, 1979, 274). On the matter of brotherhood and community feeling, there is surely no better appeal to situational brotherhood while instilling courage to realize it than in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*.

Appeal to Brotherhood

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in England now a-bed

Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.
(*Henry V*, IV.iii.60–67)

This is Shakespeare's famous scene in *Henry V* where the young warrior king appeals to the common soldier to join with him and become his brother in battle; offering him the chance to redeem himself from any vile past, and share in the glory and honor of being where it counts, in a victory that history will recall with "we the happy few" and "we band of brothers," who carried the day on Saint Crispin's Day. This warrior king's emotional appeal to his soldiers to become his brothers and redeem their past speaks to his high level of personal leadership, and to Shakespeare's understanding and use of the power of social interest/social feeling imagery conveyed through rousing oratory. Shakespeare's descriptive emotion here has been likened to a modern coach appealing to his team, in sports or business, and to the pride that flows from striving successfully towards overcoming, success, perfection, and superiority; all words recognized as describing the master motive in Adler's humanistic psychology of use (Charlesworth, 2016, p.1440; Ansbacher, 1968, 131).

Moving from the military to teamwork in the corporate world, Alper-Leroux (2019) endorses this appeal to brotherhood from a human resource perspective: "They follow you because they believe in you and your mission. At that level, they'll make personal sacrifices for you. Deep down, all people want to be part of something bigger than themselves" (104).

Shakespeare shows us another example of a high level of leadership in action when Mark Antony, after success on the battlefield against Caesar, thanks his men for their individual efforts which have brought victory. He tells them they are formidable and describes how each man fought as though Antony's cause were his own (Charlesworth, 2016, 1440):

For doughty-handed are you, and have fought, Not as you served the cause, but as it had been each man's like mine (*Antony and Cleopatra*, IV.viii.5-7).

This is what occurs in the best teams, groups, and organisations as they move from dissonance to resonance (Alper-Leroux, 2019). Such team members own the cause and strategy as though it is their own, generating group cohesion and a feeling of togetherness, all goals of Adlerian therapy. Shakespeare not only deals with issues such as team players versus individuals, but with controlling emotions, being reliable and consistent, knowing yourself, getting over doubt and uncertainty, and increasing resilience. Shakespeare is no academic, he touts action, and to use what you have. He illustrates this in *Hamlet*.

In *As You Like It*, (II.i.12), he writes: "Sweet are the uses of adversity."

And in *Measure for Measure* (Act 1, scene 4): "Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt."

In dealing with resourcefulness and resilience in the face of adversity, Shakespeare has the jester Falstaff say, as he tries to find any good in being plagued by gout or the pox (*Henry IV, Part II*, I.ii.246-247): “A good wit will make use of anything. I will turn diseases to commodity.”

The coaching lesson here is to be resilient, optimistic, and pragmatic, making do and using what we have (Charlesworth, 2016, 1194).

Coach and Life Coach

Charlesworth (2016, p.196) has used Shakespeare’s sonnet 94 (Shakespeare’s lines 1-8 on the left) as a modern sports coach’s creed (his modern English to the right):

They that have power to hurt and will do none,	<i>Use Power wisely and do no harm.</i>
That do not do the thing they most do show,	<i>Keep your strategy hidden and unpredictable</i>
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,	<i>Provide direction and persuade</i>
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow –	<i>While remaining objective and calm</i>
They rightly do inherit Heaven’s graces,	<i>Do these things and rewards will come</i>
And husband nature’s riches from expense;	<i>Your program will grow</i>
They are the lords and owners of their faces,	<i>Your excellence will become the way</i>
Others but stewards of their excellence	<i>Of those under you.</i>

These lessons are just as useful to conducting successful psychotherapy and counseling clients towards success in life tasks. Shulman (1981, 174-179) reported on his short-term Adlerian group psychotherapy in a U.S. Army Post Stockade and how the group cohesiveness and social feeling grew and carried over to other stockade situations. Hamm et al. (2016) reported on an Adlerian group intervention with emotionally troubled youth in a residential treatment center that was combined with positive psychology techniques. Like Shulman’s 1981 report, Hamm et al. also reported that the positive energy gained in the group spilled over outside the group through peer interactions. Eriksson (2019, 2) observed that the social feeling generated in Adlerian group interventions in young adults with neurodevelopmental disorders such as ASD and ADHD with associated comorbidities likewise grew and extended socially over to others outside the group.

Adler echoes Shakespeare’s appeal to brotherhood in the work towards a common goal. In the preface to “Religion and Individual Psychology” (Adler, 1979), Jahn states: “For Adler, the brotherhood of man is a goal of almost religious enthusiasm.” (273)

As well, Adler (1979) cites the idea of the Divine as a reason for our striving towards perfection: To strive towards God (the Divine), to be in Him (It), to follow His (Its) call, to be one with Him (It) – from this goal of striving (not of a drive), there follow attitude, thinking, and feeling (275).

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare knows that many of us will drift along in the world if we don’t have a meaningful dream or purpose: “It is the purpose that makes strong the vow” (Viii.23).

And in *Hamlet*, Ophelia says: “We know what we are but know not what we may be” (Act 4, scene 5).

Adler’s Vision

Adler’s vision of social interest/social feeling linked to striving for a form of community as if humankind had reached the goal of perfection is clear when he writes that the value of an increased community feeling cannot be exaggerated. It gives courage and a more optimistic view, and can entirely change any outcome, as Shakespeare illustrates in his plays:

The mind improves for intelligence is a communal function; the feeling of worth and value is heightened giving courage and a more optimistic view; it fosters a growth mindset as opposed to a fixed mindset; it favours devotion to one’s work, objectivity, logic, and a readiness to take on responsibility; the individual feels at home in life and feels his existence to be worthwhile just so far as he is useful to others and is overcoming common, instead of private feelings of inferiority (Adler, 1964, 155).

Hence, according to Adlerian Psychology when we make the effort to understand and value life, ourselves and others really well, we will of necessity start to feel the harmony and beauty of life. Our human nature will resonate with Nature, which enhances our own sense of well-being and purpose, and those around us too, giving us and them more courage and confidence (Eriksson, 2017, 259).

The nucleus of Adler’s theory of personality is the concept of a unitary, goal-directed, creative self which in the healthy state is in a positive, constructive, i.e. ethical relationship with his fellow human beings (Adler, 1979, 6).

Adler (1964, 329) says that up until the modern era it was chiefly the poets who best succeeded in getting the clue to a person’s cognitive lifestyle. William Wordsworth (2008) gives testimony to this in his 1802 poem, “My heart leaps up,” which catches a glimpse of what Adler unveils as style of life, and this before the onset of psychology as a separate discipline.

Wordsworth writes: “The child is father of the Man.”

Adler (1964, 329) reveals that Shakespeare was “one of the pinnacles of poetic works of art that led him to the insights of Individual Psychology.” He adds: “Some day soon it will be realized that the artist is the leader of mankind on the path to the absolute truth.”

Adlerian Psychology with its Style of Life Assessment is The Key to Understanding Personality and Shakespeare’s Characters

Community feeling (or lack of it), objectivity, action, and understanding individuals in their social setting are at the heart of Shakespeare’s message and his created characters, in addition to being key to Adler’s psychology of use. A playwright and artist of human nature *par excellence*, Shakespeare is not partisan or sectarian and never pleads anybody’s cause. He emotionally invites us in to share in the lives of his created characters such as Hamlet and Falstaff.

Harold Bloom (1998) in his book *Shakespeare – The Invention of the Human* claims much for Shakespeare: “Falstaff and Hamlet are the invention of the human, the inauguration of personality as we have come to recognise it... Personality, in our sense, is a Shakespearean invention, and is not only Shakespeare’s greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness. He extensively informs the language we speak, his principal characters have become our mythology, and he, rather than his involuntary follower Freud, is our psychologist.”

It is not Freud’s objective, impersonal psychology that comes closest to Shakespeare, who mirrors to us our human nature. It is Adler’s subjective, creative psychology towards individual significance and purpose, with its emphasis on showing the client his or her view of themselves and their fictive life goal, that advances Shakespeare’s cause and makes this assessment available for all:

Children learn to live in their world and relate to others in response to their perceptions. This response, the style of life, is the cornerstone of Adlerian theory (Mosak, 2005; Watts, 1999), and references individual convictions about self, others, and the world. Individuals filter new events or relationships through their style of life (Dillman Taylor & Mullen, 2019).

Awareness of our own personal approach to life and self arising from our childhood perceptions and conclusions is important as every counselor knows, because it means clients can choose to modify it, once it is accepted. Belangee (2019) writes:

An essential part of my work with each client is a lifestyle assessment, which was a key element of Adler’s own clinical work with clients or patients... When clients come for counseling, they tend to be lacking insight into the reasons they do what they do and how it is that their thoughts and beliefs govern their emotions and behaviors.... One of the goals in Adlerian practice is to help clients uncover those interpretations and perceptions that are preventing them from feeling or being productive in meeting the demands of life (205-208).

In this regard Adler has delivered a practical tool to help individuals understand themselves better; clearly an ongoing task that Shakespeare knew well: people’s faults do seldom to themselves appear. Their own transgressions partially they smother (The Rape of Lucrece, 633).

Adler on Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Falstaff

“Falstaff’s most distinctive qualities are his mischievous audacity, animated scheming, and his comically inflated view of his ability to seduce women and deceive people without arousing suspicion or inciting revenge” (Falstaff has little social interest/social feeling as he uses what he has to advance his own cause and not be found out.) “Shakespeare’s sympathetic portrayal of the character as a fallen but congenial rascal resonates with many who find his amusing follies refreshingly human” and, so, excusable (Mary McCleary, “The enduring appeal of Shakespeare’s Falstaff,” *New Boston Post*, 2015).

Hamlet is the typical prince of the realm before his father's death. He was betrothed to a sweet courtly lady and was given to hunting and having fun with his friends. Then comes his test of character on meeting the ghost of his dead father, the old king. The ghost cries out to Hamlet for revenge, telling him that he has been murdered by Hamlet's uncle Claudius so as to usurp the throne. Shakespeare tells us that Hamlet is not up to this challenge and test of character. Hamlet attacks himself for being over-thoughtful and lacking in courage, and not being able to express adequately his emotions. Adler (1964, 320) refers to this scene and tells us that the melancholic with hesitating attitude will use his weakness as a weapon to achieve significance and avoid responsibility and that it may go so far as annihilation. This of course it does when the whole court including Hamlet dies at the end.

“Acting as If ”

Hamlet attacks his mother for jumping so quickly into his uncle Claudius's bed to stay Queen. He tells her to put on virtue and “act as if” she is virtuous since the habit may stick to her through use. This makes Hamlet look superior in his own eyes when he himself cannot find the courage and the emotions he needs to act himself over the murder of his father:

Assume a virtue, if you have it not.
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight,
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence; the next more easy;
For use almost can change the stamp of nature.
(III.iv.162-170.)

Adler's own “acting as if” technique encourages clients to begin acting as if they were already the person they would like to be (Adler, 1964, 76; Watts, April 2013, *Counseling Today*) and is similar in concept to Shakespeare's “assume a virtue if you have it not” recommendation. The Adlerian process asks clients to pretend and emphasizes that they are only acting. This helps to bypass potential resistance to change by neutralizing some of the perceived risks (Watts, April 2013, *Counseling Today*).

Artistic Ability is Vital

Adler (1964) states that some form of artistic ability, or an artist's approach to life, is vital for the therapist. He describes those traits of character which give rise to its development and which Shakespeare shows in abundance:

To be a therapist, artistic ability is required, which cannot be achieved without mature self-understanding, ready wit, the ability to convince, being convinced oneself, and a sufficient ability to guess, to identify, and to co-operate (Holub, 1935, 87) and

some day soon it will be realized that the artist is the leader of mankind on the path to the absolute truth (329).

Leonardo da Vinci also speaks to the importance of artistic talent in addition to scientific knowledge: “The artist sees what others only catch a glimpse of... learn how to see, realize that everything connects to everything else” (Greene, 2015,11-12; Eriksson, 2019, 3).

Conclusion

Shakespeare’s plays are available in modern English, so there is every reason for modern students and clients in class or group settings to follow Adler’s “act as if” and Shakespeare’s “assume a virtue if you have it not” from *Hamlet*. Emphasizing the pretend part of the acting will help to reduce any perceived risks that the client or individual has. Following Shakespeare’s scenes will add credibility as they have become part of our mythology, be potentially transformative, and advance Shakespeare and Adler’s cause of helping humankind to better understand human nature and our own selves.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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