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A Tool of Facilitating Courage: Hope is a Choice

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Problems of living today seem worse now than ever as fear dictates our thoughts, feelings, and actions at home, school, and work and in our society. For many the goal of living a happy life seems unattainable; fear permeates their whole being! Courage has generally been overlooked in the psychological literature. In fact, psychology has taken much more interest in the analysis of fear rather than cultivating its counterpart, courage.

The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, the authors will elaborate how Individual Psychology is a psychology of courage. Secondly, the elements of facilitating courage will be discussed. Lastly, a tool of facilitating courage: “Hope is a Choice” is included to illustrate the processes of encouragement.

The Psychology of Courage

Why is living in this world so difficult? Existentialist philosophers and psychologists have called the problems of the 20th century *apathy*. People who were overwhelmed by fears and anxiety escaped into a state of feelinglessness [*affectless*] space and were unable to *affect* the world around them (May, 1950/1977). These themes of attitudes of “mind your own business” and “it doesn’t matter” have endured into the 21st century when the quiet, depressive apathy has turned into *hostility* toward self and others.

Mental health is not the absence of mental illness. It is not enough for psychology to only point to the presence or absence of disease. We are more resilient than most of the psychological theories are willing to describe. Psychology, therefore, must recognize and embrace the values that promote and prepare the individual to undertake the problems of living. We need a psychology that can help us face fears, overcome our inadequacies, care for one another, endure suffering with courage and hope, and live in harmony with oneself, family, community, and humankind.

To Alfred Adler, the answer to apathy and the road to happiness (or better put, the meaning of life) is the courage for community feeling. The criterion for the healthy social living, for Alfred Adler, was the extent to which the individual experiences belonging via contribution and cooperation. The feeling of community can inspire and prepare us to face life problems with courage and to take responsibility for ourselves and others. Individual Psychology operates from the following principles:

1. We are social beings. The meaning of life is to achieve belonging and significance via cooperation and contribution in the interest of our fellow humankind.
2. All behaviors have a purpose of achieving social significance and belonging.
3. We are whole beings (i.e., thinking, feeling, and acting); all aspects of life are inseparable (i.e., work, love, friendship/family/community, harmony with self and others).
4. We make meaning of our early experiences and act within this framework throughout our lives.
5. Life is movement. We are endowed with creative power to overcome, compensate and strive toward a guiding goal of perfection.
6. Perfection is fiction. When we strive for perfection, we are bound to experience problems of overcompensation or under compensation.
7. Equality presupposes belongingness. Problems of living stem from the individual inferiority as well as collective inferiority.
8. Courage and social interest are universal values, which are both the ends and means of personal and social well being.
9. Personal freedoms exist together with social responsibility.
10. Happiness is the goal of global humanity. It is attainable when individuals and societies recognize the strengths from within and without that cultivate the courage of social living (Yang, Milliren, & Blagen, 2009).

Adler was the pioneer to the systems thinking that we are only part of the whole and thus, life is never perfect for the individual. The discouraged individual operates from the fear of failure, lacks acceptance and courage for imperfection. The discouraged individual resorts to an exaggerated feeling of inferiority that propels his/her excessive attempts to strive toward success by overcompensation or self preservation by under compensation or evasion in some or all life tasks.

We believe that Adler's mature theory is the psychology of courage that provides us the best road map by which the virtue of courage is teachable. Our fear of rejection and failure is the root of all problems. Comparison and competition is our typical coping method in the home, at school, and at work. When living becomes difficult, we tend to respond to challenges with overcompensation, under compensation, or total evasion of one or more life tasks. The answer to these difficulties is courage. Change is possible when we modify our attitude of self interest to social interest by the courage to cooperate and to contribute.

From Fear to Courage

When we operate from fear, we allow fear to dominate our thoughts, feelings, and actions. We often respond to fears with what would lead to a momentary sense of okayness or control within ourselves or with others. When fear outweighs our problem, it makes our development and adjustment challenging as we relate to ourselves and the world. When we are constant captives of fear, we become restricted and blind to the world and what it can offer. Fear can stop our forward movement. In our extreme fear, hostility toward self and the other (instead of harmony) becomes the prevalent way of response to conflict. In our inFEARority, living becomes helpless, hopeless and meaningless. In our fears of defeat or not making it, we feel inferior!

Fear and inferiority work to either propel us for socially useful action or lead us to the feeling of inadequacy. Inadequacies are safeguarding devices that deprive us from our freedom and responsibilities of living. Instead of contributing to the *main tent* of community life, fear and inferiority encourages us to create *sideshow* activities that distant ourselves from resolving the problems of love, work, and friendship.

As fear is manifested in inferiority, courage is present as the creative power that motivates the individual's movement toward his or her chosen goal. The timid or safeguarding individual often meets challenges with blaming, wishful thinking, self-centering, double mindedness, competition, fictional life goals, and other methods that create a need for undue attention, power struggles, revenge, or depression. On the contrary, the profile of a courageous individual is characterized by the absence of self-serving interest, safeguards, exploitation, superiority, and the presence of aesthetics, agape, altruism, courage, hope, empathy, meaning, endurance, movement, stillness, coherence, encouragement, reconciliation, wholeness, regeneration, and social connectedness.

The threat to our courage comes largely from our lack of preparedness, which is masked as our fear. The fundamental problem for an individual lacking courage is the fear of making mistakes. Our discouraged or "less than" feeling becomes worse when it is interlocked with a society that is mistake-centered. It seems as though the harder we try to be good, or "better than", the worse our problems will become. Our fear is mostly guided by the fictional goal of perfection and the sense of superiority as *compensation* in response to our feeling of inferiority even when we are motivated by the desire to be useful.

On the other hand, our choice of socially useful activities defines good compensations that transform our perceived liabilities to assets such as social responsibility, closer contact with humanity, acceptance and conquest of difficulties, and social courage. Activities of good compensation lead, secondarily, to a sense of power, to social esteem, and to security. We can achieve social significance with useful attitudes that reflect the courage of self-affirmation and the courage of participation in spite of difficulties as we meet the life demands of work, love, and social relations. To Adler, courage is a precondition to real cooperation by which we may move from the useless side to the useful side of adjustment, to face life tasks, to risk mistakes, and to feel the

sense of belonging. A lack of courage, in contrast, breeds feelings of inferiority, pessimism, avoidance, and misbehaviors.

Only those are able to muster the courage to advance on the useful side who consider themselves a part of the whole, who are at home on this earth and in this mankind. (Adler, 1956, p.159)

Overall, courage can be seen in the individuals whose characteristic attitudes toward life are optimistic, creative, and prepared to cooperate and contribute for the benefit of other people. Lack of courage and social feeling, on the other hand, accounts for all failures in social life. Courage is often seen in the development of a well-adjusted individual who possesses a sense of social interest. Within this feeling, he/she is affirmed with his/her self worth and his/her willingness to participate in social living.

Processes of Facilitating Courage

I do believe that life is just a day in school. All our experiences are but lessons in some form or other which condition us for our larger destiny. What matters, and what matters only is what we do with the problems.

Bill W. in Cheever, 2004, p.43

“How do we obtain and facilitate courage and social interest in ourselves and with others?” Or better formulated, “How could we creatively facilitate healthy changes that encourage individuals to develop a sense of self-worth and common purpose with a community feeling?”

Yang et al. (2009) present numerous strategies and tools to facilitate courage. They believe the courage facilitator can be anyone who possesses social feeling and recognizes the immediacy and value of courage with another fellow human being. That the courage facilitator is someone who gives courage in his/her relationships with self and others. This implies that the courage facilitator is a warm human who holds more “Yes” attitudes than “No” attitudes. He or she acts as a whole person, and encourages confidently with feeling, sensitivity, and social purpose. The courage facilitator values quality in a relationship and sees change as a learning process that involves choice and consequences.

The courage facilitators attempt to understand individuals’ attitudes toward life and how they act upon problems of social living in early recollections, family constellation, and stories of the individuals. As the facilitators listen to the disclosures, they look for lifestyle themes or patterns in one’s thinking, feeling, and acting. Specifically, they facilitate the individuals’ understanding of their own narratives of their strengths, the “what should have been” and “as ifs” that could be their dreams/needs/goals, problems and challenges, as well as usefulness and uselessness of their current problem resolution endeavors.

Understanding how individuals adjust and adapt in the face of difficult life tasks, concerning both the welfare of themselves and others, allows the courage facilitators to

see these sources of discouragement and encouragement. Depending on whether there is an absence or presence of courage, the individual creatively chooses one path or the other. One could be mistakenly taking a pathway toward self interest or toward contributing and cooperating with one's self and others on the pathway of social interest. The self-bounded individuals are those whose style of social living can be described as pampered or neglected, in other word, discouraged, when only the encouraged individuals can display other directedness.

When defined using the spiritual root meaning of *courage*, encouragement is the process of development of one's courage toward positive life movement. When looked at as a psychological concept, encouragement is the process of giving courage that strengthen the "psychological muscle" of a person. Encouragement can be used to "inspire, foster, stimulate, support, or to instill courage and confidence" (Dinkmeyer & Losoncy, as cited in Cheston, 2000).

It is through encouragement that the facilitator *gives courage*, empowering the individual to challenge his or her misdirected goals and see a new direction and take actions. Through encouragement the facilitator helps the discouraged individual to activate social interest and create meaning and purpose in life. In Adlerian literature, it is often written that human beings need encouragement like plants need water. Encouragement thus has become the core of all interventions for those who experience discouragement. Both the professional and the lay person can use encouragement to facilitate courage for change.

To effectively facilitate change, the facilitator must be aware of the components of facilitation that sometimes are referred to as change processes or goals in the Individual Psychology literature: Rapport building, psychological investigation, mutual understanding, and re-orientation. Always with encouragement, the facilitator wins over the individual's cooperation and works with him/her to establish and maintain a mutually respectful relationship to redirect and take actions toward new life goals with new strategies.

Conclusion

Individual Psychology offers the most amendable framework that is open to a collaborative understanding of what courage is and how we may use courage to enhance our social living. Adler is regarded as the father of self help and self psychology, and the forerunner for cognitive, existential, humanistic, and positive psychology. Adler's thoughts of community and self help deeply influenced the cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous and the AA's practices (Blagen, 2008). Such interconnectedness allows us a wonderful opportunity to develop and compile tools by which we can uncover our strengths and train for courage that will endure the test of culture differences. Included in the following is one of the twenty tools Yang et al. (2009) designed to facilitate courage.

A Tool of Facilitating Courage: Hope is a Choice

Rationale

We live in a troubled world and we often work with individuals who struggle for meaning and spiritual direction. Hope, like courage, can produce endurance and encouragement for us in the face of fear and despair. In Individual Psychology the courage to *hope* is manifested in our striving for a better future that brings not only change of our immediate living but also human progress. To hope is to live the goal of the future “*as if*” the future is realized in the present. Hope has the dynamic possibilities of transforming/self-transcendence. Hope is a way of thinking and believing that is goal directed that produces routes to desired goals with the motivation to use those routes. It is when we are most vulnerable and powerless we are given the most profound opportunities to risk believing that things will get better. Even in the most despairing of times each of us possess the power of choice. Facilitating hope in and of itself creates the opportunity for positive personal change (Blagen & Yang, 2008). It is in our hope for the ultimate sense of belongingness that we fulfill our dreams of work, love, and social relationships so that we become connected beyond one’s self, away from isolation and self-absorption, and towards the greater community.

Objectives

1. To develop the understanding that hope is both a cognitive and emotional concept that allows one to move toward one’s goal
2. To facilitate the person in need of hope to locate and enhance his/her motivation
3. To facilitate the development of a plan that will be actively carried out
4. To facilitate the self encouragement skills

Instructions

- A. Identify a situation where the individual feels discouraged or experience losses. Help the person to express his/her emotional, behavioral or perceptual concerns.
- B. Assist the individual in a reason for change
- C. Allow the individual to hold the conflicting views
- D. Use encouragement to increase the individual’s desire for change
- E. Conduct strength assessment from client stories.
- F. Once the desire exists, assist the individual in understanding how best to enact the change by developing a plan
- G. Identify life style themes (or life attitudes) that present challenges to the individual’s implementation of the plan using early recollection or family constellation.(Hope Worksheet)
- H. Identify disjunctive emotions relate to the decision to change or not to change
- I. Reinforce hope by facilitating self encouragement using family motto or spiritual affirmation (Sori and McKinney, 2005).

Hope Worksheet

Situation of Concern	Ideal Goal Desired	Plan or Strategies
Personal Information 	Life Tasks Work – Love – Friendship – Family – Community – Self – Universe –	Family Constellation – Early Recollections –
Psychological Pattern 	I am – Others are – The world is – God is or Life Is –	Therefore: Strengths: Challenges:
Options Opportunities Directions ² 	I have – I am – I can – I will –	Others have – Others are – Others can – Others will –
Self Encouragement 	Replace disjunctive emotions with conjunctive feelings.	Family motto – Spiritual affirmation –

Note: Examples of *disjunctive feelings* are: sad, dejected, disappointed, glum, lazy, hostile, depressed, nervous, blue, fearful, timid, hateful, spiteful, apathetic, anxious, resistant, numb, jealous, envious, etc. *Conjunctive feelings* are love, admirable, like, hope, happy, pleased, glad, enthusiastic, interested, curious, confident, toward, accepting, grateful, etc.

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