The Self-Defeating Patterns of Living with an Exaggerated "As If" Lifestyle

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Abstract

The author shows that when Vaihinger's fictional "as if" concept is not taken metaphorically as a guiding goal, but instead is taken literally, self-defeating patterns of living ensue, creating an exaggerated "as if" lifestyle and hindering the individual in living authentically with oneself and others. The author gives examples working with this "lifestyle" as a process that includes cocreated explicit and implicit dialogue between client and therapist. This bidirectional relationship, and the therapist's encouragement, unconditional acceptance, and support fosters a transformation in the client's self-defeating patterns of living into one of more genuine reality and greater social interest.
Keywords: exaggerated “as if”, private logic, recognition, feeling of inferiority, innate potentiality, social interest, (Gemeinschafstgefühl), safeguarding shield, process of therapeutic alliance.

In this article, I discuss the self-defeating patterns of living with what I term an exaggerated “as if” lifestyle. I argue that when Hans Vaihinger’s fictional “as if” construct is not taken metaphorically but literally it becomes a defensive shield, creating an exaggerated “as if” lifestyle that hinders one in living authentically and creatively with oneself and others. Two examples of an exaggerated “as if” lifestyle are presented: one from literature Pastoral by Gregorio Martínez Sierra, (Chastain, K., 1997 pp.231-244), and a clinical vignette. Pastoral serves as an allegorical example of an exaggerated “as if” lifestyle, and highlights the importance of Adler’s cardinal concept “social interest”. The clinical vignette explains why an exaggerated “as if” lifestyle was chosen and provides examples of what I call the process of therapeutic alliance, which includes silence; pausing; breathing and focusing; open-ended statements, as opposed to interpretations; and enactment with the early recollection.

Adler developed his concept of “subjective finalism” from Vaihinger’s fictionalism — his philosophy of “as if”. “Fictions
according to Vaihinger are ideas including unconscious notions, which
have no counterpart, yet serve the useful function of enabling us
to deal with it better than we could otherwise" (Ansbacher &
Ansbacher, 1956, p. 77). An example of the "as if" is "If I am good I
will go to heaven" — maybe, but one cannot prove that there is a
heaven; however, this belief is useful in helping one live. The
teleology of the "as if" philosophy is called "finalism": the fiction
lies in the future, and yet influences our behavior today. These
"guiding fictions", when they approximate reality, and are adaptive,
can help one live: but if they are divorced from reality, and
function "as if" they are true, are detrimental to the individual.
"The fictive activity of the mind is an expression of the fundamental
psychical forces, fictions are mental structures. The psyche weaves
this aid to thought out of itself, for the mind is inventive —
(Vaihinger cited in Ansbacher, p.78). Vaihinger also says that the
fictional is subjective, "subjective is fictional" (Ansbacher, p.83).
Adler adapted his psychology to Vaihnger's "As If" philosophy, and
tree psychological meanings of the term fictional, as subjective,
created, and unconscious, are the most essential components of
Adler's goal concept (p. 90).

The fictional goal cannot be reduced to objective causes, such
as heredity or the environment, but depends on the creative self and
apperceptive schema of an individual's experience and interpretation
of his/her situation. Using the "as if" concept at times as a
strategy for changing patterns of behavior can be constructive (Carlson & Sperry, 1998, cited in Watts, Peluso, & Lewis, 2005). "The rationale for this reconstructive strategy is that as someone begins to act differently, they become a different person". (p.73; see also Watts et al., 2005). I acknowledge that the "as if" guiding fiction when taken metaphorically is part of creative and healthy personal agency when setting realistic goals for achieving one’s hopes and dreams. Lazarsfeld (1949) speaks about her clients comparing themselves to characters in fiction that they have read, and urged her to read what they had read and consider the protagonists in the fiction. She said that when she took their advice she gained a greater understanding of her client’s "traits", and discussing these fictional situations with her clients increased their self-understanding (p.28). In contrast to Lazarsfeld’s clients, my client Michelle would often try to personify what a queen represented – charm, power, beauty, and recognition. Embodying and identifying herself as a queen was her way of protecting a vulnerable self. It is important to know that her metaphorical identification was an exaggerated, self-defeating "as if" pattern.

My article will focus on the unconscious motivations and psychic internalizations that, due to a lack of a positive infant-parent dyad, develop into an exaggerated "as if" lifestyle. The lack of nurturance and recognition causes the child to create a shield that falsely protects a vulnerable self. We are born with what Adler
called a "normal feeling of inferiority", and we are dependent upon adults for safety and security. This "normal feeling of inferiority", however, must be nurtured early on in life, so that purposeful "as if" striving becomes part of an authentic lifestyle, and not an exaggerated "as if" personality lacking social interest.

A person's basic preparation for social living is laid down in infancy, before language is available to express thought, before feelings are rehearsed out of sensation, and before action is independent of the random movement of trial and error. In that time before a time could be distinguished, we are already in a world of social being, and already beginning to sense the extent of our being welcome or unwelcome in it (Powers & Griffith, 1987, p. 8).

In my clinical vignette, I argue that an exaggerated "as if" personality often forms because of the lack of recognition and welcoming that Powers and Griffith (1987) write about, which creates a need to protect oneself by building a shield, a rigid "private logic", and a self-defeating apperceptive schema of living. My client didn't receive the nurturance necessary from her mother to develop her potential for social interest: however, a therapist's encouragement, recognition, and unconditional social interest (Gemeinschaftsfühl) allowed my client to reflect on her early
recollection and other painful experiences so that she understood and felt the suffering that made her build a shield.\textsuperscript{1}

A lack of healthy attachment and bonding with a parent or significant other early in infancy creates a shield that holds a vulnerable and/or fragmented-prone self together, albeit at the expense of considerable mental suffering, restrictions, and interpersonal difficulties (Orenstein, 1991, p.380).

My first example of an exaggerated "as if" lifestyle is the character of a young shepherd Alcino in the play Pastoral by Gregorio Martínez Sierra. Pastoral demonstrates the heartbreak that occurs when one believes in one's fiction, and is oblivious to reality - lacking social interest and the connectedness to others and the world at large. It helped me with my work with my client in encouraging her to understand her unconscious motivations of why she took on the fictive persona of a queen.

*Pastoral*

It is winter, and we meet the young shepherd Alcino, who is chatting with Eudoro, an old shepherd in his cabin. Eudoro is telling Alcino "amables mentiras" (lovable lies) about an enchanting,

\textsuperscript{1}Gemeinschaftsgefühl – "social interest" is having a relationship to one's community, but it also includes a connectedness to all sentient beings - people, animals and plants. It is reverence for the cosmos.
beautiful queen.² He says that she is as beautiful as a rose, with blue eyes and golden hair. The young shepherd asks if he has ever seen her and the old shepherd says, yes, many times in dreams. Alcino then asks if dreams have color and Eudoro says yes: “Children’s dreams are white and carry small metal discs that adorn their clothing”; “Young men dream in red”; “Older men have purple dreams and dreams the color of the setting sun”; “Old men have dreams of an indecisive color and falling leaves – they dream only of memories and remembrances” because, as Eudoro says to Alcino, “You have to know son that old men only dream of remembering”. Alcino then says that he wants to see the Sun Queen, not dream about her, and asks if she still lives. Yes, says the old shepherd, for those who can meet her and find her, but I never understood her. Alcino is so enchanted by the tale of the Sun Queen, and obsessed in finding her that he doesn’t hear or understand Eudoro’s words. He then goes off to find the Sun Queen with Eudoro’s blessing. On his way out of the old shepherd’s cabin, he passes another cabin, where a beautiful shepherdess, Rosa Maria, is weaving and singing. She asks him where he is going and he says to find the Sun Queen. Rosa Maria says she will go with him. They go off together – time passes, season by season. Rosa Maria enjoys all the seasons – the snow in winter, spring flowers, autumn’s falling leaves. She tries to engage him to

² I relate the gist of the story in English because the translation of the play could not be found
enjoy nature’s beauty, and look at her, but Alcino is frustrated, unable to enjoy anything, Rosa Maria tells him “look at the crown of roses in my hair”. But Alcino says: “I will find the Sun Queen, “and repeats this mantra every day. Alcino is stuck in his private logic, unable to relate to Rosa Maria. The play is a fairy tale and the seasons speak. Spring is a woman who tells Rosa Maria, “You have the secret of life,” and tells Alcino to look at her. Alcino, however, doesn’t hear what Spring tells him because he is stuck in his search for the ideal woman. He didn’t listen to Eudoro and took the old shepherd’s words literally about the Sun Queen instead of metaphorically. Stuck in his pursuit of a fictional dream, Alcino misses out in life. In one of the scenes it is harvest time and the harvesters are singing, “happiness is in the grapes,” “drink our vine,” Alcino desperately asks them if he will find the Sun Queen if he drinks their wine. They say she is with us, Alcino drinks the wine, gets drunk, and falls asleep. The harvesters leave, and Rosa Maria is with him trying to get him out of his stupor. In the final scene of the play, winter has returned, and Alcino wakes up and asks what happened to him. Rosa Maria tells him that the harvesters abandoned him and that she took him home when he lost consciousness. “I also lost my dream,” Alcino says, and as he opens his eyes and looks at Rosa Maria he realizes that she is the Sun Queen. “You are white and rosy, and have golden hair…. You are the Sun Queen…. I just found you,” but Rosa Maria says: “You have to know shepherd only once
in a lifetime, I am each one’s friend”. Alcino asks “but will I find you?” Rosa Maria says: “Perhaps, but I never use the same spindle in weaving, or sing the same song.” Then she disappears. Rosa Maria as the Sun Queen symbolizes beauty, reality, the appreciation of life, and the importance of social interest. She has the ability to relate to others, and not be a prisoner of a negative private logic that is part of the exaggerated “as if” lifestyle that Alcino is burdened with.

“The normal person... takes guiding principles and goals, metaphorically, with

the sense of “as if”. “To him they are a figure of speech,”

heuristic practical constructs

“The neurotic, however, catches at the straw of fiction, hypostasizes it, and ascribes to it a

real value. “Finally, “in the psychosis, it is elevated to a
dogma. The symbol as ‘modus dicendi’, dominates our speech and
thought” What makes madness is literalism. (Adler, quoted in
Hillman, 1983, p. 111)

A Clinical Vignette

Michelle is an attractive 27-year old woman who came to see me because she was having problems, or as she said at our first meeting, “My life is a mess”. “I have problems with my boss, my friends, and especially with my mother – she is a bitch.” At our first session,
she ranted and was angry at everyone. Michelle wants to become a famous singer, and this is the most important thing in her life. She is working at a law firm as a receptionist to pay her bills. Her relationships with her girlfriends and her on-and-off boyfriend, David are combative and volatile. At the end of our first session Michelle asked, "Do you think you can help me?" I replied, "I will try, I help some." Before the second session, I received a call from Michelle saying that she couldn't come, because she was low on funds. I told her to come to the session, and we would discuss the fee. Michelle came and said that she can pay me.

We just looked at each other. Both of us understood that she was testing whether I really wanted to work with her – this implicit knowing was the first step for Michelle to feel that she mattered to me. In many of the early sessions, Michelle would complain about her mother: she said that her mother abuses her not physically but verbally, saying she is fat and dresses horribly. Michelle's parents divorced when she was 12 years old, and she was often left to take care of her two siblings – her brothers Jason and Larry, who are two and three years younger respectively. I didn't ask for Michelle's early recollection in the first few sessions, because the therapy hour was overwhelmed with whatever turmoil and anxiety she was experiencing that week; however, a little later I asked her for an early recollection.

Michelle's Early Recollection
Michelle remembers when she was about three years old, crying in bed, wanting her mother to come in the room and soothe her. Her mother refused and told her it was past her bedtime, and she had to go to sleep. Michelle kept crying that she was thirsty— but remembers her mother saying, “you had your juice and milk, you are not thirsty, go to sleep, stop crying, you are a cry baby, cry baby, cry baby.” She says her mother then stopped answering her, and she only heard herself crying. Michelle says she was “wailing”, her cat jumping on her bed, curling up next to her, and then she fell asleep.

We spoke about this early recollection briefly, but she didn’t want to go into it. In the same session, Michelle said “I will show my mother, my friends and the world that I will become a famous singer— then they will treat me as a queen, because I am a queen.” She laughs after saying this, and then begins to cry. Michelle’s shoulders were slumped, her teary face not looking at me, as though she was ashamed of her crying and her pain. (“To a certain degree every emotion finds some bodily expression. The individual will show this emotion in some visible form; perhaps in his posture or attitude, perhaps in his face, perhaps in the trembling of his legs and knees” [Adler, 1932/1980, pp. 40-41]). I suggested to Michelle that she just breathe, relax, and, if she wanted, to close her eyes. Michelle came back the next week and said that she was happy that we didn’t analyze the early memory, or “use psychoanalytic jargon.” She then said, “I
am glad that we just relaxed, this is new for me." Many sessions later Michelle brought up her early recollection again.

At the beginning of our work together, I listened to her and followed her wherever she was going - she was the choreographer. I then slowly introduced my steps, the two of us creating a pas de deux of trust and faith with each other in this bidirectional and codirectional relationship. When Michelle would ask me what to do in certain situations, I would answer with open-ended responses, so that she could get hold of her experiences, take action, and make decisions on her own. We listened and connected with each other explicitly and implicitly where we were in each session, which created a hermeneutic process of clarification and unfolding between two human beings, thereby developing a strong bond of social interest. "Social interest" is more than a feeling. It includes "an evaluative attitude toward life" or Lebensform. "Lebensform is to see with the eyes of another, to hear with the ears of another, to feel with the heart of another" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 135). Of course, I would make certain statements that I felt were important for Michelle to hear, not to dash her ambitions as a singer, but to wake her up to reality so that she could let go of her defensive pattern of living the exaggerated "as if" lifestyle as the queen. An example of a session follows.

**Going to Different Venues**
Michelle goes to different venues to sing: pubs, open mikes, competitions. She came to this session very upset, because another young woman won the chance to sing at an event that Michelle was hoping to win. She told her friend Lisa that she wasn’t chosen, but Lisa was cruel and said: “Get real girl, there are other good singers in New York.” “We then had a very unpleasant exchange, and I am not speaking to Lisa. Then, she kept repeating “I can’t understand it,” “I was better,” “I am the queen”. I paused and said: “You are Michelle,” “Yes”, I said “You are a very good singer.” She then said: “I have to admit something, I drank a lot again, when I was told that I didn’t get chosen.” (In the past, she would resort to liquor to camouflage her frustration and anxiety, but in the few years working with her, she would only toast someone on special occasions.) She looked at me waiting for me to reprimand her.

I said: “What did you feel about drinking so much?”

“I felt awful, and looking at me, “You’re angry at me, aren’t you?”

“No,” I said. “I am just concerned that you don’t have much sympathy for your anxiety.”

Michelle understood that I didn’t endorse her behavior, but I was not angry or judging her. Just sitting and being there with her, she was able to connect to her thoughts and feelings. A few minutes later, I told her to be attentive to whatever was coming up for her in her body (e.g., feelings, sensations) and to focus where she felt them.
She held her hands on her upper abdomen and said: "I feel the tension here". I told her to breathe into that area and not fight whatever was coming up in her body. At the end of the session, she said, "It's better, less heavy." Our bodies hold language - the emotional, painful memories of speech that we heard as infants, but were unable to respond to. "That anxiety comes from not being able to know the world you're in, not being able to orient yourself in your own existence" (May, 1976, p. 61). A few more examples of sessions follow.

**Christmas Day**

In this session, Michelle came in very upset about the weekend. Sunday was Christmas Day, and her mother made a big lunch for relatives and friends to celebrate the holiday. Michelle didn't want to go. But her mother told her that her cousins wanted to see her. Her mother opened the door, looked at Michelle up and down and said: "What are you wearing - a mini dress - it's too short for you." "You have to be much thinner to wear a mini." Michelle said that she was unable to speak, "I felt as if a dagger was thrust into my heart. I was numb, I couldn't answer her." Michelle then went into an empty bedroom, sat on the bed, pausing and took several deep breaths - then her numbness melted a little. Michelle was in a state of what the English poet John Keats termed "negative capability" - where one is in the space of openness, uncertainty, and freedom by accepting whatever arises. She went back and joined the others at the table, but left before desert, making the excuse that she was invited to
another party. She went home and cried, and then did some of the exercises that we would do together. She placed her hands on her upper abdomen (solar plexus) and gently pressed both hands on this part of her body, feeling and focusing on the warmth of her hands; she was able to gradually relax and let go of her pain. Another exercise to relieve the emotional disturbance of negative thoughts was to go into the space between these thoughts. She did this exercise after the solar plexus exercise. She tried to see what was in between her painful thoughts – she said she saw only space and by being and staying in that spaciousness, she felt better, calmer and freer. "These exercises help empower the client because he or she can use them independently whenever the need arises" (Sakin-Wolf, 2003, p. 77).

Sunday Brunch and the Guitar

Michelle came to the session anxious and distraught. She started telling me that David (her on-and-off boyfriend), called her on Sunday excitedly to tell her that he bought a guitar, and that he wanted to take some lessons. He wanted her to look at it, because she has many guitars, and then they both could go out for brunch. Michelle agreed to come over. As soon as David brought out the guitar, and gave it to her, she strummed a few notes and said: "This is real junk – what did you pay for it?" He said $120 on e-Bay. She then continued – the strings will break in no time, and get your money back – David said: "I can’t return it." She continued: "A good
guitar costs at least $250." It's good enough for me, he said. He then said he wasn't hungry and didn't want to eat. Michelle left and went home, but had an awful feeling of unrest. I listened to her and then said: "This is déjà vu."

"Oh, gosh," she said. "I dug a dagger into David's heart, just like my mother did to me on Christmas, I feel horrible, and I really hurt David. What do I think I am an expert of guitars? The Queen."

"No," I said, "this is Michelle speaking and feeling another person's hurt, and sensitivity."

She then said: "I am going to call David and say I'm really sorry."

"Good", I answered, "this is a good déjà vu." We both smiled at the end of the session.

Michelle was showing greater social interest, willing to take responsibility for her behavior, and realizing that others also have feelings. As mentioned above, much later in our work together Michelle said that she wanted to talk about her early memory again. I suggested that we enact the early recollection together, since she didn't much like over analyzing.

Enactment: The Early Recollection

M [Michelle]: Baby Michelle is crying, calling her mom for water
S [Sakin-Wolf]: Let's pick up baby Michelle. [I place my arms in a cradling position and rock my arms from side to side as
though I am holding her, and give her some water. I then give baby M. to Michelle, who copies my cradling and rocking.] M: Baby Michelle is asleep. [Michelle takes baby Michelle in her arms and begins to sing very softly to her. She then puts the baby down, and crisscrosses her arms around her chest and rocks herself. I then copy what Michelle does, and we stay with this for a few minutes in silence.] Michelle then cries and says thank you. S: Thank you for sharing.

"If we take the clarifying contributions of enactments seriously, then we can recognize that they can make memories and experiences accessible that would otherwise not become available" (Lachmann, 2010, p. 151). Bringing the past into the present in a new, transformative way helped my client reorganize and accept herself. Bonding with the child in her helped Michelle in freeing herself from a self-protective, confined identity, and enabled her to be who she is, not the queen.

"Children want to be fondled, loved, and praised. They have a tendency to cuddle up, always to remain close to loved persons, and to want to be taken into bed with them. Later this desire aims at loving relationships from which originate love of relatives, friendship, social feelings (Gemeinschaftsgefühle), and love" (Adler, quoted in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 40).
The mirroring of the early memory is a relational event. "At a phenomenological level, mirroring is the mirrored individuals experience of being seen, gotten, or understood by the (parent or analyst) in a compassionate manner that promotes an alteration in the individual's sense of self" (Van der Heide, 2009, p. 433).

In a subsequent session, Michelle brought up our enactment of her early memory and said that she felt much lighter. I asked her to elaborate a little, and she said that she doesn't feel as angry or stuck. I understood her saying that this experience enabled her to let down her guard and allowed her creative self to emerge. Michelle's letting go of her defenses is similar to Ghent's concept of surrender. For Ghent, surrender is to find "one's identity, one's sense of self, one's sense of wholeness, even one's sense of unity with other living beings" (Ghent, as cited in Sperry, 2014, p. 104). This freedom helped her develop greater social interest.

**The Dream**

Michelle often told me in the past that she has no dreams or that she doesn't remember them, I was very happy to hear that she wanted to share a dream.

I am a little girl, maybe five years old, and I am in the park with my friends Shirley, Lisa, and my boyfriend David is there eating a sandwich. He is 28, the age he is now. I ask him
for a bite and as he is about to give it to me, my mom appears, smiling and hands me a bottle — it's a glass bottle with milk. My mother then transforms into you Shulamith, and then somehow, I join my girlfriends and I don't see you or my mother. Michelle said that she woke up feeling good.

S: What do you think the dream is telling you?

M: That I don't have to hide, I joined my friends, I am developing trust in myself and my friends.

S: The time span is interesting — David is 28, but you are about 5.

M: Yes, I'm accepting David's kindness — he is taking care of me, accepting my vulnerability as a child and willing to give me a bite of the sandwich.

S: Your mother with the milk?

M: It's like my early memory, but here it's changed, she is giving me milk to drink. She is kinder, and I view her in a different way.

S: Interesting. A glass bottle, not a carton of milk, just a glass of milk, and milk symbolic of breastfeeding and nurturance perhaps?

M: Yes, mother's milk, and nurturance. I agree with you, and glass, maybe "Through the Looking Glass," like Alice in Wonderland, and glass is transparent, so I'm beginning to
see things more clearly. I’m coming out of the rabbit hole. [Michelle smiles and chuckles at her own comment.]

S: Your mother transforms into me, and then we both disappear separately?

M: Yes, by transforming her into you, I view her as being much kinder and I’m accepting her more and not fighting with her as much. You both disappear and I’m standing on my own two feet, and feeling stronger

S: You also joined your friends and David in the dream

M: I’m accepting them more, and realizing that no one is perfect. It’s also less lonely

In this dream, there is a transformation in Michelle. She is shedding some of her self-defeating patterns of living as the queen, letting go of her private logic of the ways things should be, participating with others and letting her “innate potentiality” for social interest express itself.3 “Every human being strives for significance, but people always make mistakes in they do not see that their whole    significance must consist of their contribution to the lives of others” (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 156). The dream also reveals Michelle’s creative authentic lifestyle unfolding - what Adler called

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3 See Ansbacher & Ansbacher on Innate Potentiality- 1956, PP. 134-135
each person's "unique law of movement." "The so-called conscious and unconscious are not contradictory, but form a single unity, and the methods used in interpreting the "conscious" life may be used in interpreting the "unconscious" or "semi-conscious" life," the life of dreams. Only by considering dreams as one of the expressions of the style of life may an adequate interpretation of them be found (Adler, cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, pp. 358-359).

Michelle was becoming aware of her fantasy as a queen, and realizing that by not wanting to accommodate to her mother's needs, and reality, she created a false self. "Accommodation" means the child adopts the view and feelings of a parent at the expense of his or her own experience" (Doctors, 2017, p.47). This defensive shield was a two-edged sword that protected her and hampered her at the same time. What is to be understood, as well as the very nature of psychological nature itself, is precisely the fictional nature of subjectivity. Then "unconsciousness" refers mainly to the fact that we are unclear about the subjective fictions that style our lives. In our terms: becoming "conscious" means to recognize the fantasies playing through all behavior, and the psyche's need for psychotherapeutic understanding means that it asks to become aware of its fantasies (Hillman, 1983, p. 110).

Michelle's relationship with her mother has improved. She says that she believes her mother often picked on her and criticized her but not her brothers because she competed with her as a female, yet
wanted her to be the beautiful perfect daughter. She says: "I pause now and don‘t always catch the ball" (meaning responding angrily to her mother when they disagree). "Don‘t always catch the ball" was something that I suggested to Michelle, telling her that she was not in a tennis match with her mother and that there are no winners or losers. Pausing and letting go at times helped both to relate to each other in a kinder way. "I guess," Michelle says, "It must have been very hard for my mother to support three children." She also says that her mother was not available for her when she was growing up, because she was not able to let go of her own needs. Michelle‘s father was never a presence in the house, and doesn‘t remember him getting involved with the children. Her father is re-married and lives with his new wife on Los Angeles. She sees him on occasion when he comes to New York. Her mother now comes to hear her perform at different places. Michelle still wants to be a well-known artist, and I make sure never to thwart her dreams; however, now her dreams and goals have a more realistic basis. She is looking to offer her talents as a singer to schools that have extra curricula after classes, to senior citizen centers, and maybe to sing for people in hospitals. "This is why one can never localize creativity as a subjective phenomenon, one can never study it simply in terms of what goes on within the person. The pole of world is an inseparable part of the creativity of an individual. What occurs is always a process,
a doing, specifically a process interrelating the person and his or her world” (May, 1976, pp. 51-52).

Summary

This is a brief summary of my article, but I have not concluded my work with Michelle, and I don’t claim that she didn’t resort at times to some of her self-defeating patterns. All of us repeat patterns of living that are detrimental to us: we are not perfect human beings, but we can learn to accept our mistakes more objectively and with greater kindness to ourselves and to others by having “the courage to be imperfect” and “to risk making mistakes, to risk the uncertainty of living and doing, thereby overcoming, our own safeguarding tendencies toward self-deception” ((Dreikurs, as cited in Terner & Pew, 1978, p. 88). This article presents two examples of what I term an exaggerated “as if” lifestyle: Pastoral, and a clinical vignette. Pastoral is an allegory, of what happens when one is obsessively blinded by fantasy, is unable to relate to others and shuns reality, resulting in a tragic outcome. The main character, Alcino, has an exaggerated “as if” lifestyle. He is searching for the “Sun Queen” – a dream of what he believes is the ideal woman, unable to see that the beautiful “Sun Queen” is Rosa Maria. Pastoral highlights the importance of “social interest,” one of Adler’s most important concepts. In the clinical vignette, Michelle embodied the exaggerated “as if” lifestyle of a queen, a defensive strategy to
protect herself. Adler said, “In the sole of the child, a guiding line forms which urges towards the enhancement of the self-esteem in order to escape insecurity” (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 99). These examples show that when Vaihinger’s “as if” concept is not taken as a heuristic construct, self-defeating patterns of living develop, in the clinical example, the therapeutic alliance of explicit and implicit dialogue, which included pausing, silence, focusing on the emotions of the body, and just being together, helped transform self-defeating ways of living into one of genuine personal agency by developing self-esteem and fostering social interest. My journey with Michelle continues.

Coda

I would like to end this article with a few lines from the poem “As Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flame” by Gerard Manley Hopkins, because it expresses for me what Adler said is our lifestyle – each person’s “unique law of movement”:

“Each mortal thing does one thing and the same;
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves-goes itself, myself it speaks and spells,
Crying what I do is me: for that I came”

(Hopkins, as cited in Valente & Reynard, 2006, p. 113)
References


